

Magic causality

*The Function of Metaphor and
Language in the Earlier Verse,
Essays and Fictions
of Jorge Luis Borges, read as
Constitutive of a Theory of
Generic Incorporation*

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I declare this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Signed in original hard copies

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Abstract

Borges saw narrative as the bearer of universally re-combinable elements. Although these elements seem sequential, their essential formal integrity guarantees their rearrangement to generate new narratives. The *ficción* lives beyond its author. However, Borges' ontological anxieties also have a life of their own that undermines the *ficción*'s assimilative potential.

By developing poetic and linguistic insights Borges creates immortal text through the construction of a symbolic repertoire. Each element of the repertoire has its genesis in the author's personal development. This history is archaeologised in the early poetry and mediated through a theory of metaphor and the reader's interaction with the text. Borges sees no need for a Freudian reading theory. Instead he develops an anti-psychological poetics. He enlists the reader as a willing participant in the text by a dual strategy of symbolic incorporation. Firstly, readers identify with characters through vicarious emotional prediction. Secondly, he refreshes the reader's participation by presenting emblematic devices serving as sub-text to enhance symbolic participation. Together these strategies constitute a 'magic causality' of negotiated textual interpretation continually operating in his narratives. But the discipline of magic causality also conceals a rhetoric of presence establishing counter-motivational effects to disturb symbolic incorporation at the level of genre.

The dissertation extracts key features for scrutiny from Borges' early literary theory and criticism, elaborating them into a general aesthetic programme. It examines biographical influences in shaping his critical and creative work. It problematises his texts from the point of view of his ideas about linguistics, their identity as contributions to the genre of the *ficción*, and the centrality of metaphor and analogy as interpretative strategies. I use a number of approaches for this enterprise, including biographical criticism (ontological preoccupations), substitutional analysis (temporal subjectivity), linguistic interpretation (theory of metaphor), literary criticism (readerly reception), structuralism (readerly incorporation), and

deconstruction (rhetoric of suppression). The dissertation pragmatically investigates, and contests, Borges' assimilative poetics of textual presence.

Glossary

(Many of the terms which appear here may be familiar from linguistic philosophy and structuralist theory. However, because of the need to develop a specialised terminology for Borges' ideas many terms which appear in this glossary may be unfamiliar. Also Borges' own use of these terms often requires some clarification. Where an analogue can be found in the work of well-known structuralist and narratological theorists I have attempted a comparison. Where this is not possible I have done my best to provide helpful explanations.)

aesthetics, *anti-psychological* - narrative relying on a strictly causal reduction, and where the constantly recurring images of a story are structurally constitutive. In a discussion of Poe's 'The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym' Borges isolates the main motivational plank as the feature of 'whiteness': all the action is directed to either avoiding, or resisting its fascination.¹ **See** 1.4.1 *Anthropomorphism and Pantheism: Revealing the Life of Objects*

anti-psychologism - material and causal motivation in narrative as opposed to inchoate motivation based on 'interior' motivations not apparent to the reader. **See** 1.4 *Formal Motivation*

atomicity, *of words* - In Russellian philosophy sentences in ordinary language may be analysed into their constituent semantic parts, these parts corresponding to objects in the world. By paying attention to the nature of the parts the sentence may be recomposed to reveal its true sense, and referent, if any. For Borges' criticisms, **see** 3.1.5 *Verbal Relations as Weakly Psychological*

attitude, *propositional* - An attitudinal proposition is a sequence of words containing a subject, an object and any verb of affective or cognitive meaning. Thus 'Beth drives Tom to distraction' is a proposition that indicates Tom's attitude to Beth. Whereas 'Beth drives Tom to the airport' merely describes a physical act. For Borges'

understanding of word-relations as the bearers of psychological relations **see** 3.1.5 *Verbal Relations as Weakly Psychological*

causality, *magic* - a related collection of ideas in Borges that centres on the concept of recurrent and serial association as the sub-stratum of plot development. In Borges it's not only the obvious elements of plot in narrative that determine the outcome, but their interplay with a main image (say "whiteness") that "surfaces" at regular intervals to form a series of secondary associations "under the plot" as it were. The outcome of the narrative is that point where the main image is revealed as the principal causative agent of the plot. Magic causality shouldn't be mistaken for Todorov's "imaginary causality" where a helper figure functions as the incarnation of luck or chance, since his 'generalised determinism', is so diffuse that it's useless as a description for Borges' idea.² Nor should it be taken for a contestable feature of sequential assimilation, as in Iser,³ since my elimination of 'collateral resources' from the reader's symbolic interpretation requires greater attention to the fantastic over the realist elements of a text. If magic causality is any kind of theory for narrative causation at all, it must be seen as a superficial reading of the German *Motiv und Wort* school, especially as formulated by Fritz Mauthner, Leo Spitzer and Josef Körner.⁴ **See** 4.1 *Magic causality*

collateral resources - narrative furniture, all non-symbolic objects in a text besides the actions of its characters. What makes the text recognisable in the first place. Texts have different levels of collateral resources. A realist novel is collaterally rich in that every mention of a thing (weather, clothes, cars) contributes to the reader's ability to locate it within a recognisable environment. Conversely, fantastic narrative is collaterally poor in that most objects have a symbolic value which is privileged over their value as narrative furniture. **See** 4.2.3 *A Return to Transhistorical Subjects*

complex, *symbolic* - any collection of emblems functioning not as a textual object, but as the embodiment of abstract qualities. Thus the anti-hero in a text may enact morally negative decisions, yet still give an impression of positive moral qualities. This impression is not an *en bloc* phenomenon, but occurs as the product of a number of symbolic associations, having their own history in the text, which agglomerate in, and are borne by, the character of a major character. This does not

imply that the 'personality' of the character is the product of psychological features, but functions as the bearer of a symbolic complex through which the reader identifies the defining features of the text. Thus Borges avoids both the necessity of psychological portrayal, and the detail of realistic description. Characters reveal their fictive integrity not only through expressive acts (speech, thought, reflection) but also through the location of these acts within the text. Because the complex is located by the reading consciousness within the *person* in the text, it occupies a much more localised and individual character than Husserl's idea of passive synthesis can express. **See** 1.3.1 *Propositional Complexes in Borges*

contingency, *existential* - character-action dependent only on the external plot conditions that have been established by the particular narrative in which he or she appears, and which allow the character to persist. In narratives of psychological motivation action on the part of the character is determined by an internal dialogue of the subject with manifold forces and symbols, rather than by external circumstances alone. **See** 1.3.5 *Willing the Displacement*

defamiliarisation - in a phenomenological sense, the privileging of any image or idea that allows it to stand out for inspection beyond the bounds of normal experience. **Not** a reference to the Russian Formalists' idea of *ostranenie*, or 'making strange'. For Borges it constitutes a violation of expectations at the level of language use in daily life. **See** 3.1.4 *The Secret Life of Words*

economy - the exchange-relations of a system. Any set of relations that can be categorised in terms of transfer, duplication, substitution, exchange, etc. A number of recent examples that can be appropriated as models of literary economics come to mind, Louis Althusser's *Reading Marx*, Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, François Lyotard's *The Differend*, among others. **See** Chapter 5 *passim*.

emblem - an identifying feature of any object described in text, but not the whole object itself. Thus in fiction old age may be indicated by any feature commonly associated with it: i.e. creaking furniture, dry and dusty interiors, etc. The 'life of emblems' is the continuous use of certain emblems in varying combinations by which the reader is able

to recognise the text as both an individual author's work and the continuity of its symbolic repertoire. **See** 2.1.2 *The Life of Emblems*

fallacies, *ontological; historical* - Two types of poetic object management. In the first an archetype (i.e. 'woman') is transferred beyond any carnal consideration by romantic idealisation. In the second the poet assumes a transcendent point of view beyond historical processes, thus becoming immune to material contingency. **See** 2.3.2 *Woman/God as Parallel Abstractions in Borges*

functionalism, *verbal; semantic* - not to be confused with functionalism as a theory of cognitive linguistics. The doctrine merely indicates that words may be characterised by their grammatical *function*. Naming something as a verb, for example, obviously limits its interchangeability with other parts of speech. The challenge for the semanticist is to determine the conditions under which verbal interchangeability is lawful or unlawful within a language system, from this deducing a series of law-like conditions for substitution within a larger semiotic context. **See** 3.1 *A Functionalist Theory of Verbal Relations*.

grammatical time - the use of the word 'time' as a marker for any period of duration which may be substituted for it without destroying the grammatical sense of the sentence in which it occurs. Thus, in the sentence: 'I haven't seen you for a long time' a *long time* may be exchanged for any other phrase that also expresses a sufficiently long period, like *three years*, or *five months*, depending on the emotional attitude of the addressor. While interesting in itself, this classification is meant to give a rule by which we may discount grammatical word-use when considering particular words in poetical utterance. **See** 1.2.2 *Time as a Word* & 1.2.3 *The Grammatical Use of Time*

idiomatic (or grammatical) - use-features of particular words. Idiomatic use can be described as the conditions under which a word is used in a phrase, where replacing that word with an analytic instance would render the phrase lexically opaque. For example, as in the English phrases: 'I haven't seen you for a long time' and 'I heard a song of that time', the word 'time' in both cases is not replaceable by a specific periodic term, say 'four years and three months' and '1956'. Grammatical use can be described as the substitution of a term within

its class without this resulting in lexical opacity. In the Shakespearean sonnet this applies where love is described as not being 'time's fool. Replacing 'time' with any term of the same class, say 'the ages' or 'eternity' ('Love's not the Ages' fool,' or 'Love's not Eternity's fool') may supply the same grammatical sense, although neither the scansion, nor the beauty, of the original. **See Chapter 1.**

lexical opacity - the experience of not understanding a word, either due to our own ignorance or its non-legal use. **See above.**

magic - see *causality, magic.*

Metaphor (and kenning, kenningar [pl.]) - In Aristotle 'what may happen when of four things the second stands in the same relationship to the first as the fourth to the third; for then one may speak of the fourth instead of the second, and the second instead of the fourth.' ⁵ Any substitution of one term in term-pair for the term in another. **See 4.2.6** *The Kenning as a (Borgesian) Exploration of Metaphor*

Object - (and Super-Object) - a distinction between the personal and general character of phenomena, as evidenced in Borges' references to a 'time' that can be read as either a specific phenomenon of duration (Objective Time), or as a means for projecting his subject-position beyond the immediate frame of reference in order to participate in a quasi-universal phenomenon (Super-Objective Time). Thus the word 'time' for Borges assumes the status as an Object and a Super-Object on different occasions. **See 1.2** *A Theory of Syntactic Substitution for Grammatical, Objective, and Super-Objective Time in Fervor de Buenos Aires.*

Object-in-the-text- Not to be confused with the foregoing or the following, an Object-in-the-text is a discursive convenience, which can be thought of as the identification by the reading intelligence of the physical characteristics usually appended to the thing named in the outside world to its counterpart in the text. A Super-Object (see above) on the other hand, is the idea of a thing *outside* the particularity of the text. This is, I feel, an advance on previous phenomenological accounts that posit an 'image' as liminal to consciousness. Because the 'Object' is physical and 'in-the-text' it may be readily distinguished from any extraphysical components it

may have in the reader's imagination.⁶ Its extraphysical components, including any undisclosed psychological affects which the reader brings to his or her reading, constitute its Super-Objectivity. In Borges' case we may speculate he constructs the Super-Objective use of 'time' in order to explore a quasi-historical distancing between himself and his work, stepping outside the poem for a moment to carry on a dialogue with God. **See Chapter 2.**

object, textual - the combination of emblems that constitutes any particularity in the text. In phenomenological accounts a 'passive synthesis', since not all of its constituents are actively cognised. **See 3.2.1 The Management of Conceptual objects in the Text**

ontology (and unease) - one's idea of the nature of existence, both generally and individually, but always predicated on the idea of persistent identity through time. Existence may be spoken of as continuous, or discontinuous, universal or particular, teleologically informed or teleologically neutral, relative or absolute. In a more general sense, and certainly in the sense in which I employ the term throughout the dissertation, one's individual sense of ontology may be dependent on apparent guarantors of persistent identity, either singly or in various admixtures: memory, a body of literature, science and technology, the social transmission of mores, religious prejudice, racial doctrine, emotion, responsibility. Unease about ontology would therefore be the result of doubt concerning any aspect of persistent identity.⁷ **See especially Chapter 1.**

repertoire, symbolic - the collection of whole objects-in-the-text that make up all instances of figurative substitution. Thus Borges' symbolic repertoire is composed of coins, mazes, mirrors, books, etc. since all these things are never simply themselves (i.e. in the capacity of collateral resources) but always stand as objects via which another relation is described. **See 1.1.3 Archaeology of the Source**

substitutional analysis - a technique for determining absolute semantic values against their poetic, or literary, backgrounds. As its name implies, a key word is selected and analysed in terms of the ways that its paraphrases may logically substitute for it. The differences in semantic value discovered are used to theorise the relationship that the writer has to his or her subjectivity *qua* author. In

the dissertation only two terms have been selected for study: time and space. Their choice was not arbitrary, but based on their importance in Borges' work as structural principles. Actually, any term may be selected for substitutional analysis, providing it is general enough to furnish adequate ambiguities of sense that may then be investigated. **See** *Chapters 1 & 2*.

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Introduction:
Causal Magic in Borges

I have titled this dissertation *Magic causality: The Function of Metaphor and Language in the Earlier Verse, Essays and Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges, read as Constitutive of a Theory of Generic Incorporation* because I wanted to bring together a number of apparently disparate elements and synthesise them into a reading of Borges' work that presents his thought as an evolutionary process, rather than a *fait accompli* that must be explained according to the dictates of any particular literary or philosophical system. There are other studies that adopt the same approach. Gene Bell-Villada's *Jorge Luis Borges: A Guide to his Mind and Art* is probably still the best in English, although Malcolm Read's 1993 materialist study, *Jorge Luis Borges and his Predecessors*, and Beatriz Sarlo's contemporary cultural analysis, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge*, are moving up fast on the inside. Thankfully such studies are becoming more numerous as English-speaking academics seek to explore the earlier, less homogeneous writings, rather than the now exhaustively mined *ficciones*.⁸

As the title suggests, I have adopted a functionalist approach to poetic analysis, seeing the role that a key term plays in its text as a way of investigating its use in other areas of literary interpretation. The way that Borges uses the words *time* and *space* in the early verse is, I claim, indicative of deeply held attitudes and beliefs that inform, and trouble, his later artistic production. To extend the analysis, I have focussed my investigation on Borges' examination of metaphor as a primary tool of poetic creation, hypothesising that the relations that metaphor brings into play between words can be scaled-up to offer an account of the way in which symbolic narrative elements can be deployed to create a representational apparatus.⁹ But even though these elements *constitute* the particular text, that isn't to say that their existence as components wholly determines it.¹⁰ Borges' symbolic resources evolve to create a repertoire of interchangeable narrational elements, which are not merely a battery of motifs Borges deploys at will, but the symbolic effects *in themselves* that go to make them up.

The interaction of these symbolic effects is what creates the magic in the best Borgesian fiction, establishing a network of liminal narrative clues that presents an alternative to the psychologically-influenced fiction of character, and relying instead on the formal interplay of subtle symbolic inferences for its effects. Mature Borgesian poetics *causes* its audience to adopt a belief-structure fulfilling itself as a formal and functional culmination of action, but it does so with such insidious method that the effect may justifiably be regarded as magical.

I'm aware I have used the word 'magic' while only giving a cursory explanation of its place in Borges' thought. This is partly because it circulates through its space so pervasively it is difficult to say exactly what Borges means by it, and partly because its position is one of fundamental, and therefore submerged, importance to the whole Borgesian enterprise. But one should be aware that magic causality is a continuously active causal principle of narrative, and as such must be rigorously demarcated from "magical realism," which is, in the introduction of some fantastic element whose contradictions must be accounted for, more a fundamental thematic presupposition that can be historically and culturally located, than a narrative mechanism to be universally applied.¹¹ For this reason I have not introduced magic causality at the outset of the dissertation because its intricacies can only be appreciated after a good deal of archaeologising has been done to establish a set of theoretical principles that allows it to emerge. Borges himself came to the narrative form only after substantial theoretical work on poetics, linguistic analysis, and theory of metaphor. There have been studies that have used the term, or variants of it, rather carelessly, seeing it as an indeterminate narrative principle that can be easily grouped with the French Symbolists, the Anglo-American New Critics, Structuralists, Receptionists, even Post Modernists, none of whom, however, can claim an iron-clad colonisation, but most of whom can point to obvious coincidental similarities. I offer my Borges (and this Borges is none but my own, *et ad crucem captionibus*) as the bearer of a non-psychological, verbally causal theory of narrative reception, no doubt flawed and fragmentary, but one which nevertheless offers insights enough to warrant its further investigation.

Chapter One, therefore, opens the discussion by foregrounding the fundamental concerns which influenced Borges from his earliest childhood. These concerns were grounded in the philosophical problems that not only beset his father, a teacher of psychology and free-thinker, but with which the impressionable child was to come into contact in his earliest, and therefore formative, reading experience. Despite the obvious temptation, I have not settled on a psychoanalytical analysis, but rather based my research on reconstructing a system of ontological anxieties, for whose support we have Borges' own assertions. My reading of Borges' developing poetic subjectivity is dense, but systematic. It discusses the evolution of his thought as a dialectic of contradictory philosophical contingencies that must be resolved within the writing process. This section is therefore heavily reliant on a defence of the ontological fallacy. I claim that, despite the critical chaos into which the work is flung, its author is always the most reliable person to describe it for us, since only he, or she, was present at the moment of conception, remained during development, and endured the tortures of delivery. This does not mean, however, that I have plumped for a naive reading of the progeny as the bearer of an elemental Message: authors change their minds, make revisions, and suffer from periodic memory loss, and in many cases are the very worst enemies of their own inspiration - take the case of Poe's tongue-in-cheek *ex post facto* reconstruction of 'The Raven'. Thus, in the notorious absence of reflective self-scrutiny on Borges' part, I have adopted a semantically functionalist analysis of the early verse, determining a pattern of use arrived at through the substitution of key concepts which can only be 'read' as they occur within a formally determined system of ontological referentiality. These key concepts concur with Borges' autobiographical statements, and can be read as developmentally consistent with the subject matter and treatments of his later narratives. I have not, however, used what I call 'substitutional analysis' exhaustively, as this would require an extensive work of its own, and I limit myself to analysing the terms *time* and *space*, or rather how Borges uses these words to plot the exigencies of his developing narrational environment. This is not, however, to suggest that the author is strait-jacketed by word use. It is clear that Borges was working through a philosophically inspired poetic subject-position in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* that he perspicaciously modified in the subsequent early volumes of verse.¹² I claim that the Borges of *Fervor*

has had to come to terms with logical inconsistencies, and modified his stance in *Luna de enfrente* and *Cuaderno de San Martín* to reflect a more personal engagement with his subject matter.

Borges becomes less abstract, and more personally self-aware, after the publication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, and I focus on the notion of space in Chapter Two in order to analyse the growing tensions of Borges' social understanding.¹³ The rather closeted youth, who had drifted into the Ultraist movement in Spain, and later influenced its development in Buenos Aires, develops a new social awareness that is nonetheless torn between the poles of intimate philosophical self-reflection and political action. It is no secret which side won out in the end. Borges never claimed, save in exceptional circumstances, and only when his growing international prestige lent him some security, to be a politician or dedicated social activist, preferring the engagement with interior speculative thought to that of exterior social reform. Reading the poetic works as a developmental series, and for the moment ignoring the essays and reviews that come between them, I extend my claim that we can here determine a pattern of philosophical reconciliations that were to mark-out his later literary production. Time and space become theoretically congruent ideas; both open to the same sort of manipulations. As time can be extended and contracted, so can space. And, as space can be divided and re-joined, so can time. These, then, form the master tropes of the Borgesian fiction.

But Borges was obviously interested in more than time and space. Chapter Three selects his comments on language in the early essays for critical investigation. I claim that having established a rudimentary working-out of his own poetic subject position in the early verse collections, he used the essays to explore and consolidate a linguistically-inspired foundation for a general theory of readerly reception. Although it is possible to see such an eclectic author as Borges in a variety of ways, on the basis of internal evidence I have interpreted him as mainly a linguistic functionalist (it being his comments to this effect that spurred my own efforts), feeling that this gives a coherent reading in the light of his later narrative theory. Borges begins his theoretical work on language by investigating the comfortable assertion of the Ultraists that metaphor is the key to symbolic effect in verse. I believe that he diverged from this point of view after an initial period of attraction, incorporating his insights from

the study of logical relations into a developing theory of linguistic relations. Language for Borges is not so much a bewildering pattern of multiple inferences (*différance*), but the representation of a logical series of ideas. The practice of linguistic association creates not only a determinate set of relations that functions systemically (i.e. within an ordered set of grammatical relations), but also within a larger symbolic sphere. I claim that Borges implicitly asks, that if words name concepts, then could not the *concepts themselves* be ordered in relations that mirror those of words? I offer a Borges that is a structuralist only by coincidence, yet working to integrate some Saussurean insights with those of pre-Freudian psychology, a discipline of literary theory that would have its apogee in Anglo-American New Criticism: the mythopoesis of Lèvi-Strauss. When applied to the construction of narrative, as a determined set of conceptual components arranged to produce a mental event, Borges' pragmatics of the fantastic offer an understanding of magic causality at the level of symbolic production.

Chapter Four is an attempt to extend the analysis of conceptual production to an understanding of the reader's efforts to incorporate symbolic elements in narrative. I have employed Borges' portrayals of film imagery in reviews and essays to offer a more vivid account of the theory. The intensity of his theoretical vision, together with his philosophical insights, combine to reflect Borges' growing awareness of how iconic elements may be recombined to produce novel effects in narrative. But these visual icons ultimately depend on their lexical conceptuality. From this point of view content is privileged over form, because it is the conceptual content of the icons that determines their functionality within any genre. This is why I claim that Borges can be read as the producer of a theory of *verbal* idealism, rather than as the exponent of a materialistically-informed explanation of linguistic relations. Borges' iconography may be causally-mechanistic, but the icons are ultimately verbally-constitutive.

But just as in any good detective yarn, there are red-herrings to trouble the smooth surface of the text. These *Harengi rubri* have had to wait, however, until there was sufficient explorative water over the weir for their escape. Chapter Five resurrects Borges' ideas on metaphor and analogy to reintroduce them in the context of structuralism and deconstruction, especially as they relate to Borges'

intentions as an author.¹⁴ While such an approach may be seen as aberrant in this until now chronological account, it is only here that the insights gained into Borges' methodology may be played-off against Saussure's theory of Generic Incorporation, to investigate the ever-increasingly Borgesian corpus as a labyrinthine system of self-incorporation with its own internal logic. This is the most "psychological" chapter, dealing as it does with a theorisation of desire resting on semantic foundations. Borges the author claims to be offering a tidy set of linguistic (and symbolic) causalities, but we see that there are inconsistencies which may be investigated via the insights of deconstruction. Ultimately, Borges' account holds up well under scrutiny; the consistencies outweigh the inconsistencies, and I claim that Borges' aim of producing an enduring, although complex, narrative structure with a "life" of its own, generally succeeds.

It is important to note that the dissertation treats mainly those works which chart his development and emergence as a mature *ficcionista* in South America; that is, from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* in 1923, through the essays, poetry and prose, to *Otras inquisiciones* in 1952. It will also be noted that I have not adopted the usual dissertation format of placing a separate Conclusion at the end of each Chapter. Instead, I have placed a short Section Summary before each section within the main Chapters. This gives my critical metanarrative more fluidity, allowing the reader to follow the argument in over-view. I should stress that the *Endnotes* are not mere shows of conspicuous learning, but add important critical commentary to the material in the body of the text, much of which will otherwise appear dry and congested. The reader will find that many apparently contentious points are elaborated and justified there. I have also included a Glossary immediately before the Table of Contents which will be helpful as the reader progresses through the text. I have also given all sub-sections individual titles that sign-post their arguments and points of orientation.

CHAPTER ONE

Time in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*: Metaphysical Explorations

Prehistory and Assumptions of Method: A Possible Borges

While it's not difficult to locate the surface effects of Borges' work, it is difficult to determine the fundamental concerns shaping it.¹⁵ A genetic presupposition, one that sees the parts implicit in the whole, offers interesting possibilities. But the genetic thesis is only used as a means of theorising a possible Borges, one who, if we take him at his word, would probably have eventuated from his special personal history. For the purposes of this dissertation, I therefore argue that the forces shaping Borges' literary production have their origin in a complex of early philosophical contradictions, and his poetry (discussed chiefly in this chapter), literary theory and fiction, are a direct outcome of his attempts to resolve them.¹⁶

It's important to understand from the outset I'm not promoting a normative frame of judgement about Borges from an exclusively biographical standpoint. Using a series of interview quotes, I've established an explanation of Borges' persistent concerns about the nature of being. To attempt anything more is to descend into the nether world of biographical wish-fulfilment.¹⁷ In line with the preoccupations most frequently expressed in his *Fictions*, one can interpret Borges' intellectual progress as a dialectic of philosophical problem-solving.¹⁸ The dialectic may be conceived of in terms of the interaction of two principal influences: a concern with the persistence of individual personality, and an anxiety about the malignity of God. Taking a cue from Borges' preoccupation with problems of language, one can use a linguistic approach to isolate these key concerns and separate them from the back-ground noise of their poetic subjectivity.¹⁹

To facilitate the study of subjectivity in Borges' writing, a terminology of time and objectivity has been developed, based on the following divisions:

1. *Grammatical time* - the word time used as a temporal marker
2. *Objective Time* - a time existing beyond a particular percipient
3. *Super-Objective Time* - a time existing beyond all percipients
4. *Objectivity* - the subject's unconscious externalisation of self-awareness
5. *Quasi-Personal Objectivity* - subject's recognition of objectivity as false externalisation
6. *Super-Objectivity* - subject's suppression of QPO: auto-amnesia

In his early poetry, with which I am principally concerned in this dissertation, Borges uses the word time both as a commonsensical grammatical term, and as a personal entity, when he addresses it by name. Now, addressing time as a person presupposes that one is outside it, in which case the poet divides himself from time. However, this implies an ontological schism between Borges and the world. To be outside time is to be outside the world. To remedy the situation, Borges externalises time beyond poetic subjectivity. This, however, brings the problem of how to account for his own subject position: is Borges, or any of his personae, really beyond the world? Clearly not. To account for the division, Borges externalises his own subjectivity in a counter-move of objectification. Borges is now in the world, but regarding himself in an act of quasi-personal objectification. To evade this contradictory state of affairs, Borges is obliged to repress his quasi-objectivity, re-externalising time as a phenomenon beyond human experience. Of course, this series of rational accommodations implies that a Borges who now addresses Super-Objective Time would have to be in a similar position to the Borges who previously addressed Objective Time, leading to an eternally spiralling series of externalisations, incorporations, and re-externalisations.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 1.1

I open the dissertation with a discussion of Borges' childhood in a multi-lingual environment; from the very first Borges is

conscious of the dual voices that constitute his world. This is seen as formative for his life-long ontological insecurities. To add to this insecurity Borges' father introduces the idea that memory as well may be a linguistic effect, thus conditioning his son's acceptance of the profound division between verbal functionality as constitutive of human subjectivity, and sensual human experience. The dissertation adopts a genetic point of view to analyse how these factors affect Borges' development. It investigates them as a pattern of ontological regulation with which Borges was to struggle throughout his life.

1.1 *Childhood Memories and Ontological Problems*²⁰

Before discussing Borges' poetry, it is necessary to establish a ground upon which it was conceived. *Fervor de Buenos Aires* was to be hailed as a collection that heralded the arrival of the hispanophone avant-garde in South America in 1923. (That is, after the home-grown avant-garde had had a few years to consider it.) However, its status as an Ultraist proclamation, named after the Madrid literary journal *Ultra* whose contributors strove to surpass the modernistic impulse of the Generation of 1898, can't overshadow its genealogy as the product of a historically and culturally unique individual. Even though a handful of critics and poets warmly noted its intimism (Gomez de la Serna in 1924), and praised its Valéry-like super-realism (Evar Mendez three years later in 1927), they largely neglected the profound currents that had caused its surface effects.²¹ To understand these submarine influences we need to construct an investigative reading that dates back to Borges' earliest contacts with the question of personal being.

1.1.1 *The Divided Voice*

Borges père, Jorge Guillermo, introduced his son, as a child of ten, to philosophical reasoning. Borges himself acknowledges the important role that the anarchist, radical lawyer and Jamesian psychologist, had on his metaphysical development.²² While many other influences were to also shape his repertoire, I claim that it is the interaction of four basic ontological problems that are crucial for us to understand it. These problems are persistent concerns founded on logical oppositions, and I will now depict them briefly, before describing their probable origins. The first of these is Borges' preoccupation with the status of personal identity. Borges sees identity in terms of the interplay of psychic persistence and duplication.²³ As an illustration, the story of 'The Immortal' uses the device of a narrator who can't die, (whose original identity becomes subsumed in the identities he takes on over the next two thousand years), to question how human individuality might endure eternal existence.²⁴

The second is the possibility of exponential increase, the main theme of the 'Garden of Forking Paths' for example, where spatial ramification functions as an analogue to the plot ramifications in a Chinese novel.²⁵ Just as a garden of ceaselessly bifurcating paths would end up consuming all available space, the labyrinthine narrative of Ts'ui Pên involves us in an endlessly expanding game of narrative inter-connections and shifting subject-positions.²⁶ We become lost in the game of being read.²⁷

The implausibility of motion signifies a third ontological problem for Borges, who uses it as an analogue for the idea of illusory progression. We see its temporal *inversion* in 'The Secret Miracle,' where a condemned prisoner, Jaromir Hladík, attempts to exhaust the possibilities of his impending mortality. By imagining every possible eventuality, and reasoning that real life is never quite as we imagine it to be, he anticipates his murder by the Nazis in exacting detail over and over again. Hladík, exercising a perverse, homoeopathic logic, hopes to exhaust the potentialities of his pathetic circumstance, and so stave off an inevitable execution.²⁸ The prisoner is, of course, condemned to an exercise of ceaseless multiplication, becoming an anti-Achilles condemned to an ever-diminishing progress in his pursuit of life.²⁹

The fourth, and final, problem of being centres on recursive memory, and logically ties back into the problem of establishing a continuous personal identity. How is one to admit one exists, if we can only demonstrate existence by remembering memories, and remembering those memories, *ad infinitum*? The causal supposition of memory (a theory he inherits from his father's reading of William James and Henri Bergson, both authors for whom the problem of personal identity exercised fundamental attraction), supplies a plausible source for Borges' ontological unease.³⁰ The first three of these ontological problems emerge, as Borges admits, from childhood introductions to philosophy:

*When I recite poetry in English now, my mother tells me that I take on his very voice. He also, without my being aware of it, gave me my first lessons in philosophy. When I was still quite young, he showed me, with the aid of a chessboard, the paradoxes of Zeno - Achilles and the tortoise, the unmoving flight of the arrow, the impossibility of motion. Later, without mentioning Berkeley's name, he did his best to teach me the rudiments of idealism.*³¹

The paragraph appears commonplace enough. Borges is reminiscing about the comforts of home and hearth. However, his comments take on added significance in the context of the formation of identity, especially when we consider the roles of language and literature in forming Borges' fragmented cultural identity. Fanny Haslam, his maternal grandmother, introduced English to the *criollo* Borges clan as an alternative to Spanish and French. Borges' father, inherited this language as an Argentine Anglophile, encouraging its use within the household and amassing a large English library. This is where the young Jorge Luis introduced himself to the literary classics of his divided heritage. But it was not only to his father that he owed this polylogy. His mother, Leonor Acevedo de Borges, among other works, translated William Saroyan's *The Human Comedy* (thereby winning a commendation from Buenos Aires' Armenian community),³² a selection of tales by Nathaniel Hawthorne, selections from Herbert Read's art criticism, and stories by Melville, Virginia Woolf and Faulkner.³³ Borges, living in a Spanish-speaking country, but surrounded from the cradle by Anglophones, was prey to feelings of a shared linguistic identity. He *takes on the very voice* of his father, as he recounts in the passage above, to recite the poetry that his father had, in turn, recited to him. Thus, the act of recitation functions both as a locational, as well as a dislocational act. Borges was simultaneously made aware of his foreignness and familiarity.³⁴ To take on a voice is to reproduce the form of past linguistic experience, harking back to a history one hopes is existentially secure. For the mystic this is a foundational belief, rooted in Socratic anagnoresis.³⁵ Yet, the act itself dislocates personal identity: Borges is not his father, yet he appropriates part of his father's identity through this performance.³⁶ English becomes a way of *re-producing* the past. One might say, of even seeing the past as something we can physically manipulate. Yet, because this past divides culturally between Spanish and English, the act of reproduction signals an awareness of a divided

heritage. Where re-production attempts to slough off its representational scales and become an act of seamless duplication, as the act of taking on someone's very voice implies, this duplication can never be complete because of Borges' awareness of the mixture of cultures and languages already composing the identity he is, for the moment, appropriating.³⁷

1.1.2 *Borgesian Memory*

The examples Borges' father used to introduce his son to philosophical reasoning are no less problematic. Zeno's paradoxes illustrate the logical problems of spatial determination: in the story of Achilles and the tortoise the Greek can never overtake his rival because he must first travel one half the distance between himself and the tortoise. Then he must traverse one half of that distance, and so on, until he falls into a receding loop of ever shorter distances, trapping him at the starting line. While this *regressus ad initio* serves to illustrate the impossibility of progressive motion based on the transition of infinitely divisible portions of space, Zeno's other paradox of the winged arrow at rest demonstrates the impossibility of motion, by making motion indeterminate.³⁸ Zeno ponders that an arrow 'travels' through space, and by scrutinising its passage one might see it to be making a series of infinitely small jerky movements as it crosses from one piece of space to the next. If so, should the observer be able to say with certainty it flew through the air without committing a perceptual blunder, since at any time one sees that it was both at rest (having stopped to be noticed by the percipient), *and* stationary (not having moved), waiting to cross the next portion of space? Borges' father's used a chessboard to illustrate these arguments, allowing the child to make a clear association between the geometric regularity of the board, and the divisibility of space and time. This was a particularly fruitful means of illustration, since it allows time to be viewed like a divisible substance. Borges will probably have realised that the Achilles paradox applies equally well to time, and the infinite divisibility of time is an important theme of a number of famous later fictions such as 'The Secret Miracle,' 'The Aleph,' and 'The Zahir'. Borges was to use this principle of infinite divisibility in a later fiction, 'The Book of Sand' where a single volume, with the power of endlessly reproducing its own pages, threatens to drown the cosmos in a sea of paper. The book is also therefore

indestructible by fire, since this would start a universal conflagration, and is finally disposed of by the very Borgesian expedient of being forgotten in a library.³⁹

Added to these paradoxes, the logical consequences of memory also play a major part in Borges' writing; especially concerning memory pushed to its limits. Borgesian memory is an obsessive phenomenon provoked by the author's long struggle with morbid insomnia, a condition whose torments preoccupy him in his earliest major poetry. The insomniac becomes vividly aware of the passing of time, the repetition of trivial events taking on macabre significance. While 'The Zahir' and 'The Aleph' are metaphoric crystallisations of insomnia's morbid power, 'Funes the Memorius' most practically portrays the consequences of intractable memory, the bed-ridden protagonist eventually dying after having memorised every event in every second of his immediate environment for the last few, excruciatingly vivid, months.

One finds a possible reason for Borges having written the Funes story in another key childhood recollection, one Borges would reiterate in conversations and interviews during his career, and which illustrates the disquieting thought that memory, as 'decaying Sense,' in Thomas Hobbes' phrase, may be logically impossible as the authentic reproduction of experience:

I remember my father said to me something about memory, a very saddening thing. He said, "I thought I could recall my childhood when we first came to Buenos Aires, but now I know that I can't." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because I think that memory may be nothing more than a grammatical effect." - I don't know if this was his own theory, I was so impressed by it that I didn't ask him whether he found it or whether he evolved it - but he said, "I think that I recall something, for example, if today I look back on this morning, then I get an image of what I saw this morning. But if tonight, I'm thinking back on this image, then what I'm really recalling is not the first image, but the first image in memory. So that every time I recall something, I'm not recalling it really, I'm recalling the last time I recalled it, I'm recalling my last memory of it. So that really," he said, "I have no memories whatever, I have no images whatever, about my childhood, about my youth."⁴⁰

The suspicion that memory is impossible resurfaces in a collection of interviews edited by Willis Barnstone for his eightieth birthday, where Borges enlarges on this theory and makes a collateral observation on the distinction between sensual memory and the reproduction of memory as a “grammatical” effect:

BARNSTONE: Well, if you try to think why you think, you can't think that. Yet sometimes I walk down the street and say, not who is this walking down the street, but who is this thinking he's walking down the street, and then I'm really puzzled.

*BORGES: Yes, and then you go on thinking who is this thinking he's thinking he's thinking, no? I don't think that stands for anything. That's merely grammatical, they're only words.*⁴¹

It's not extraordinary to suggest that we can divide memory into two classes of events, the first being that of one's sensual recollection, and the other being that of grammatical effects, as Borges suggests. We can employ the division to construct a possible account of differing grammatical and propositional complexes in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. While propositional complexes describe a belief system, grammatical complexes depend solely on their semantic structuration to express meaning. The sentence: 'Beth gets under Tom's skin' may describe a physical unlikelihood, but its sense is unequivocal taken at the semantic level; Beth *literally* transplants herself under the epidermis of the unfortunate Tom. The propositional complex that the sentence describes presupposes a situation in which epidermal transfer is common. This would be a place where skins are regularly displaced, with everything that such gruesome behaviour entails: naked corpses, changed identities, an Epidermal Police. Propositional eventualities derive their force from being in opposition to a commonplace reality. It's only in the so-called, real world that a belief system can assert itself as unique.⁴² But we should conversely note that this division into grammatical and propositional sense doesn't include figurative use. Figurative use is a rational accommodation between grammar and belief: we know that Beth can't *really* get under Tom's skin, even though we understand the semantic sense of the statement, nor do we commit ourselves by accepting the statement as a rational series of sounds, to living in a world of rampant dermoklepts. The trouble with figurative use is that,

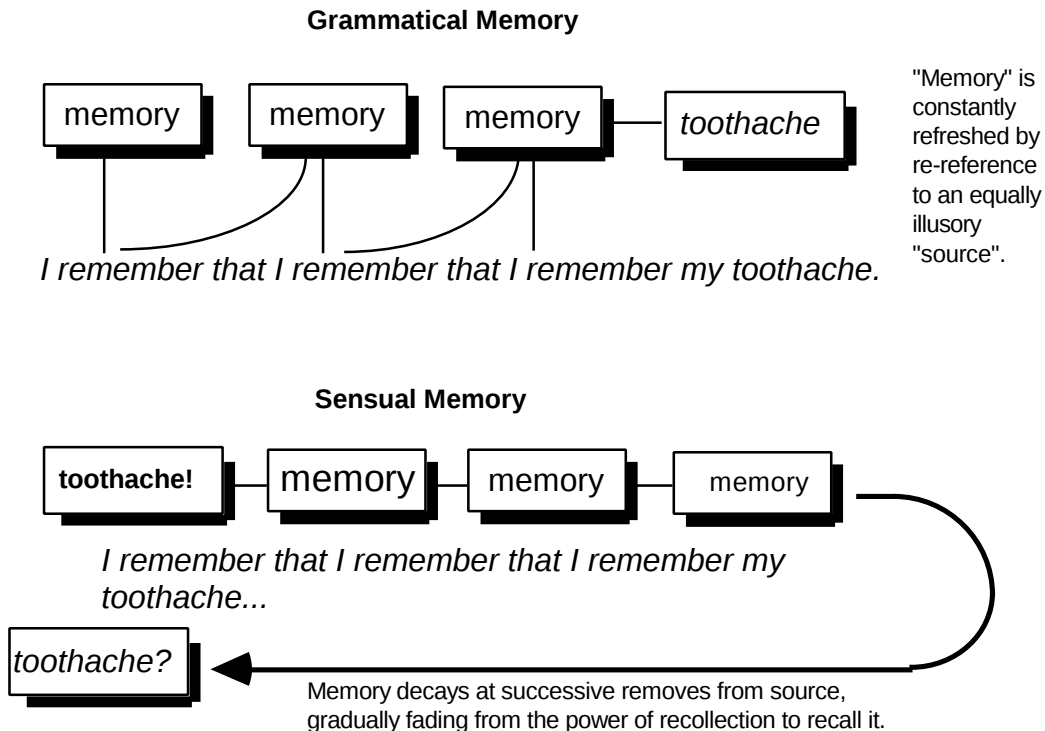
except in the case of well-known clichés having an etymological history, and despite the best efforts of over two generations of New Criticism, it is still often impossible to surely assign either grammatical, propositional, or figurative meaning to a word or utterance, and thus the expression serves as a social noise to which, in favourable circumstances, we have learned to appropriately respond.⁴³

Borges uses grammar as an armature upon which to wind the plain sense of words, and through sensual recollection, to reconstitute himself, or his persona, throughout his work. To explore the distinction between sensual memory and grammatical memory Borges elaborates:

*BORGES: You might go into a second category. You may feel a very strong physical pain. For example, you may get it through electricity or through a toothache. Then when you feel that pain, you won't feel the pain. Then after that you say, well, this is a toothache, and then you know that you felt the pain. Then after that you might for a third time and say, well, I knew that I knew. But after that I don't think you can go on.*⁴⁴

The possibility that sensory impressions slide off the scale of authenticity the further they are from their source interests Borges. Recalling the effect through language is useless, since Borges feels we may be participating in nothing more than a grammatical game. This divides what we call memory into two classes of action: linguistic memory that we reproduce through language conventions, and the evanescence of impression that decays even as we attempt to grasp it. The following diagram represents the difference between linguistic and sensory memory.

Diagram 1



1.1.3 Archaeology of the Source

This 'second category' of indirect sensual memory is important for understanding Borges' deep unease about the permanence of recollection: one seems to reproduce the pain of a toothache in the secondary memory, but there is no *direct* line of transmission between experienced pain and remembered pain. The idea of the impermanence of individual personality that this passage implies (after all, personality is directly dependent on our taking our memories for granted as representations of events), acts as an important influence to deeply condition the poetry of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. It also serves as a powerful idea which Borges was to acknowledge much later as a formative resource. Writing of his indebtedness to this first surviving collection of poetry, he admits with characteristic self-effacement:

*I am sorry to say...that I have written fifty or sixty books, and yet I find all those books are contained in the first book I ever published, in that dim book, written ever so long ago, Fervor de Buenos Aires, published way back in 1923. That book is a book of poems, and yet I find that most of my stories are there, except that they're there lurking, they are to be found there in a secret way and only I can ferret them out. And yet I keep on rereading that book and reshaping what I have written in that book.*⁴⁵

Borges here also denies his writing had fundamentally developed since *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, a claim that will be pursued in the following discussion. It has become a commonplace to assert that Borges recirculates key images, working them through in subsequent narratives and verse to create novel recombinative works of art. It is challenging, therefore, to locate the primitive elements of his mature production in this formative work. However, while some of these images occur in an obvious way, others don't. I'm not attempting to promote a wholly causative thesis, whose aim is ultimately synthetic. Some elements of Borges' mature repertoire don't appear in the early work.⁴⁶ The labyrinth, to take an obvious example, is absent as an explicit symbol in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*.⁴⁷ On the other hand Borges' famous image of the mirror appears throughout this first volume to structure it in terms of the interplay of reflections as a symbol of the search for identity, a theme Borges would return to in *Dreamtigers* much later in his career.⁴⁸ It is my contention that Borges' mature theory of 'magical causality' relies on the way these symbols function throughout the early texts, and the realisation that they're constituted from the key concerns isolated from Borges' childhood memories, outlined above. Examined as constitutive elements of his more general philosophical concern with time and space, these symbols develop into the life of emblems conditioning his mature production.⁴⁹

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 1.2

Having been introduced to the idea of two kinds of memory as a child, Borges' first experiments in verse show the construction of poetic narrative from two kinds of subjectivity: the subjective persona as such (the I of narrative), and the objective persona that is projected beyond the ambit of the poem in order to participate in self-reflexive dialogue. Progressively analysing the word "time" in Fervor de Buenos Aires, I hypothesise that it may be used to test Borges' subjectivity. As Borges works through philosophical problems he must adopt radically objective poetic standpoints to accommodate authorial transcendence.

1.2 A Theory of Syntactic Substitution for Grammatical, Objective, and Super-Objective Time in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*.⁵⁰

On the Slab

In understanding Borges' philosophical maturation, we might insist on a straight-out biographical reading, situating *Fervor de Buenos Aires* in relation to its critical reception. Such a reading, however, directed outside Borges' private world to that of an Argentine literary clique that received him only grudgingly, would be unsuitable. It would only give a fragmented view of an already fragmentary subject at best. Better, I argue, or at least more satisfying, to get inside the skin of the poems, anatomise their vital organs and watch them pulsate on the autopsy bench. To take this line of approach it's necessary to see the individual pieces making up *Fervor de Buenos Aires* as both parts of a whole, and individuals in their own right.⁵¹ For this purpose the words "time" and "space" have been selected as the most vital organs in Borges' poetic corpus.⁵²

1.2.1 Two Kinds of Memory - Two Kinds of Subjectivity

Taking Borges' division of memory as two distinct forms of reproduction (grammatical and sensual), one can extend it to explore his use of the word time in the early poetry. Just as grammatical memory, as the recollection of events through language, appears to guarantee a perpetual and incorruptible summoning-up of events, it can't, however, dispel the nagging doubt that the event itself may become entirely dispensable to its recollection.⁵³ Eventually even a toothache gets so foggy it's impossible to assert exactly how it was endured, except by recourse to the invocation of the event's name. However, there is a world of difference between saying that we remember a toothache, and recalling its pain. In this case grammatical memory supersedes sensual memory. Before too long we'll only be able to say that we remember something that we remembered before. Both work for the dissolution of the past by removing us further and further from the physical event, and in so doing, subtly aid in the dissolution of our own personalities. The only remedy to the unravelling past is to launch an obsessive quest, fastening on remembering every detail of the immediate present. Like the memory-maniac Funes in his own story, Borges refers to an

unsettling intimation of eternity he experienced on waking suddenly one night: 'I thought: this lonely vigil is already hell, this endless waiting will be my eternity.'⁵⁴ The only way to discover how Borges works through his anxieties is, I claim, to analyse *Fervor de Buenos Aires* as the *Ur-text* of this ontological unease, examining it as a grammatical document, but just as importantly, interpreting it as a dialectic of poetic subjectification.

1.2.2 Time as a Word

Borges uses the word time in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* rhetorically, grammatically and idiomatically, and I will here proceed to logically differentiate them. First, there is *idiomatic time*, as with the phrases in 'Sala Vacía'; «Desde hace largo tiempo» ('For a long time') and «...palabras de aquel tiempo» ('words of that time') in 'Ausencia'. One does not objectify time as a phenomenon, but allows it to occupy its post as a cliché metaphor of anteriority. Take the English phrases: 'I haven't seen you for a long time' and 'I heard a song of that time'. In both cases the word time is replaceable by a specific periodic term, say 'four years and three months' and '1956' respectively. It's also important to discriminate the idiomatic time just described from other forms. Without taking such care, it is impossible to determine whether the 'largo,' in the first Spanish phrase «Desde hace largo tiempo», refers to the duration of the time itself ('long'), or to the interval between the two events, that together constitute the boundary points of the recollection of the two events themselves, in which case it names an intentionally empty entity.⁵⁵ Under such conditions it's implausible to assume that at every point between parting and meeting, some hypothetical, love-addled recollector had uttered the mental expression: 'Now it is x minutes:hours:days:weeks since I last saw Beth.'⁵⁶ Even great passion has its resting stops and time; it is psychologically implausible to believe that we keep count of the hours in our sleep.

Borges the poet uses the word time in two major modalities. Ignoring its idiomatic use as a grammatical duration marker, he uses it, firstly, as an ordinary noun denoting the succession of events, and, secondly, as a quasi-personal invocation to a more generalised historical entity. It is this rhetorical strategy that I will now investigate, adopting Husserl's approach to time consciousness *solely as a point of departure* for the division between an Objective time, as our

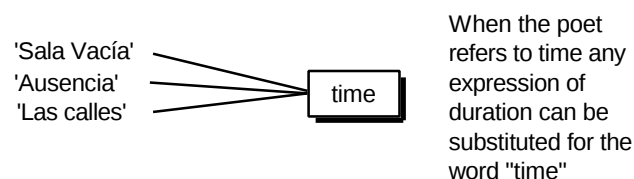
internal consciousness of the space between mental events, and a Super-Objective time, as a reference to the general phenomenon of worldly duration.⁵⁷ But such a phenomenological interpretation offers more problems than solutions, and in any event, diverges from the aims of this dissertation. To avoid the obvious imponderabilities of mental phenomena, I opt instead for a grammatical rationale to understand how Borges uses time, and it is this grammatical technique that I will explore from this point onward.

1.2.3 The Grammatical Use Of Time

We can analyse the word time in terms of its grammatical use in sentences. Time, in this sense, signifies a reference to the word 'time' that one can't replace by another term that is not its synonym, without making nonsense. When, for example, Borges talks about the back streets of Buenos Aires in 'Las calles'⁵⁸ as «únicas ante Dios y en el tiempo» it would be unhelpful to replace time with 'four years and three months' or '1956' as shown in the previous discussion on idiomatic time. However, any synonym of a generalised phenomenon, such as 'the ages' or 'eternity,' can be substituted in the phrase without destroying its capacity to make sense. Thus, although idiomatic time is often mere social noise, grammatical time always fulfils the function of orthodox sense signification. And, because it is the use of the term that distinguishes its sense, both terms can occur in the same sentence without alerting the reader to their very different functionality.

Diagram 2

Grammatical or Idiomatic time



1.2.4 Mental Events and Grammatical Conveniences

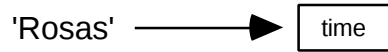
So far the difference between grammatical time and Objective Time presents no possibility of confusion, but what about Super-Objective Time? We may complain that time as the space between events, and

time as the general phenomenon of worldly duration, is a slim distinction to draw, but if one uses a formal method (i.e. one strictly relying on a word's use as a part of speech, rather than as a poetic implement), the difference becomes starkly obvious. In distinguishing the word time, one can further distinguish its apparent identity as either the marker of a mental event, or as a poetic convenience. Where Objective Time refers to the personal mental event of interval consciousness, Super-Objective Time is a rhetorical device that functions quasi-personally. It operates as an apostrophic mechanism, decentring both time and the poet in a mutual interplay of transferred subjectivity.

To illustrate this point in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* let us contrast the previous reference in Borges to another where Super-Objective time figures in a poem on the Argentine dictator 'Rosas': «si las pensamos [i.e. Rosas and other *caudillos*] como parte del Tiempo». ⁵⁹ The phrase «únicas ante Dios y en el tiempo» in 'Las calles' positioned time as a metaphorical entity to which Borges makes no personal address, while this is plainly not the case in the 'Rosas' example, where time is retentive, rather than protentive: the speaker's consciousness holds time back, positioning the urbscape before the attention of God as an object for His contemplation. ⁶⁰ This is obviously a relationship in which the poetic persona, as speaking consciousness, does not logically participate. But, on the other hand, to think anything can be 'part of time' is, conversely, to pretend the speaking consciousness before a quasi-objective phenomenon of duration, which is, I claim, the way Borges uses it in 'Rosas'.

Diagram 3

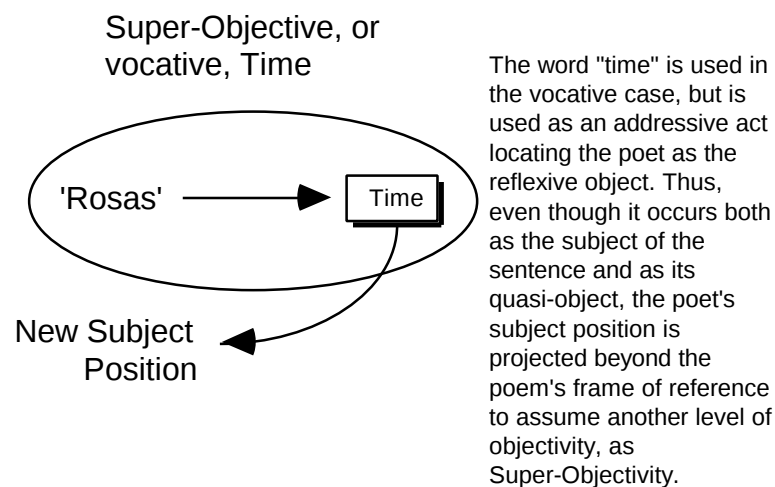
Objective (quasi-personal) Time



The word "time" is used in the nominative case, but is used as an addressive act, and thus occurs both as the subject of the sentence and as its quasi-object.

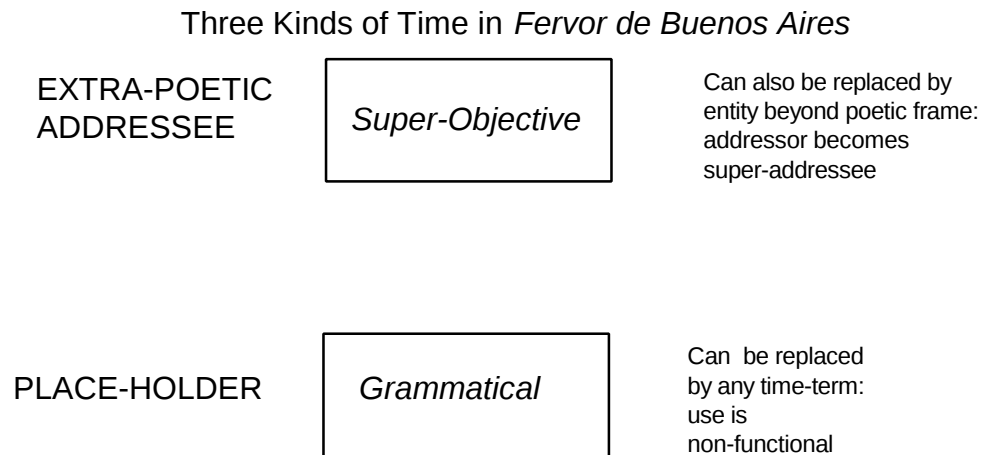
However, while this explanation is ontologically appealing, one can also state it in terms of basic grammar (i.e. formally) as a functional distinction between the nominative and vocative cases. We can conclude, therefore, that Objective Time in Borges always occurs in the nominative case, while Super-Objective Time occurs in the vocative case. In the first sentence above Borges is speaking of time as a verbal place-holder for an experience of duration, but in the second he assumes a personal position: 'if we think of *them* as part of time'. Here the *we* is an addressive act to a time of which we can, ostensibly, become part. 'Oh time,' Borges apostrophises, 'as part of which we conceive Rosas, and the rest of these *caudillos*, who have contributed to our nationhood...'

Diagram 4



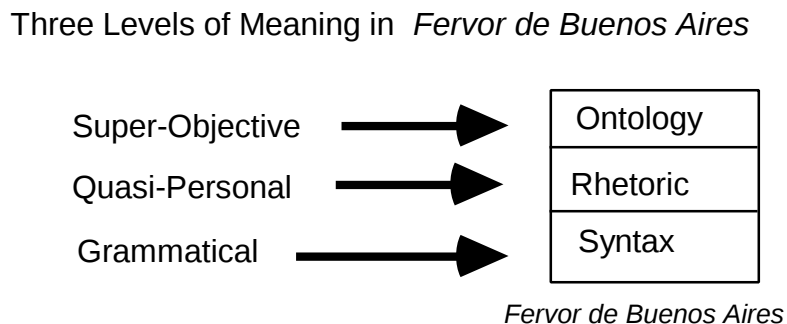
Time for Borges is, thus, the focus of multiple modalities. Besides using it grammatically, where it functions as a place-holder, he also employs it quasi-personally as a verbal act, positioning the subject in relation to time. He also uses it self-reflexively to project his persona as an extra-poetic addressee. The following diagram illustrates these distinctions:

Diagram 5



I believe we are now able to distinguish one use from the other, in any example Borges may present us with.⁶¹ We can see that Borges' subject position changes radically when he talks about time. These distinctions are useful for determining a hidden economy of propositional value in the early poetry. Borges may talk about time, but it's only by being able to distinguish when this talk indicates statements of belief, rather than being merely grammatical or poetic, that we can read the propositional attitudes determining persistent concerns for the writer throughout his life.⁶² Diagram 6 shows Borges' poetry as the combination of three levels of semantic value.

Diagram 6



THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 1.3

The interaction of ontological insecurities is theorised as formative for Borges' poetic development. Borges' philosophical understanding of the nature of human identity causes him to adopt a variety of voices in his work, each the outcome of an attempt to reconcile logical and mundane subjectivity. The rhetoric of place is used as a trope to reconcile particular human subjects within a grander universal vision. Yet Borges must still deal with the projected persona as an objectified Time, thus lending it a god-like omniscience. Time is also treated as a substance to produce rhetorical effects of accumulation. In order to reconcile these contradictory characterisations, Borges naturalises it as an ally with which to shore-up an intimist vision of human life. A side-effect is that Borges also begins to treat his own subject position as outside the exigencies of the poem, becoming trans-historical subject. But ultimately nothing can really restrain a time conceived of as beyond human agency. Borges must find some other rationale by which to constitute poetic subjectivity. It is here that the principle of Magic causality is introduced as a possible means for providing a quasi-narrative rationale that will aid Borges to navigate his till now confused and inchoate labyrinth.

1.3 Time and Four Themes

1.3.1 Propositional Complexes in Borges

So far I have discussed the persistent concerns that structure Borges' theoretical development. These concerns exist as four themes lying buried in childhood:

- (1) *The persistence/duplication of identity*
- (2) *Exponential increase*
- (3) *The implausibility of motion*
- (4) *Recursive memory*

These four themes, (which together constitute a field of regularising forces, or propositional complexes, for Borges' literary production), condition the poetry of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*.⁶³

Now let us explore the links between these themes, and the formal determinations so far made in our discussion of time. I will now give an account of how the interplay of formal determinations and ontological themes structure Borges' works.

Taking time as a motif,⁶⁴ and having separated its senses to give a plausible account of its tripartite syntactic nature (i.e. as grammatical usage, as impersonal object, and as quasi-personal Object), it is now necessary to demonstrate plausible links among the four themes of the opening discussion. I will also give an account of the occurrence of the time motif in the body of the work as a pattern of propositional complexes, before going on to the extensions that serve to deepen the argument in support of the main objective, the demonstration of the fundamental importance of these four themes in Borges' literary production.

1.3.2 Managing Personal Identity in a Hostile Universe

We can establish a link between the use of the time motif and the persistence/duplication of identity in Borges, especially in the later *ficción* 'The Immortal,' which I mention only incidentally, where the Roman tribune Flaminius Rufus becomes a succession of literary and historical figures, from Homer himself to a subscriber to Pope's translation of the *Iliad*. The poetic fiction of Super-Objective Time

even appears as a conspirator in the game: «No es extraño que el tiempo haya confundido las que alguna vez me representaron con las que fueron símbolos de la suerte de quien me acompañó tantos siglos»⁶⁵ But in his first collection of verse, *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, one has to admit that the duplicative trope of personal identity is only developed haphazardly. At times Borges seems to be fighting the duplicative impulse, at others reinforcing it. However, the tension between these objects creates a productive equivocation - a time, or God, that arbitrarily swings between individuality and communality is capable of anything. Dropping its historical guise in 'Las calles,' nominative time, along with God, becomes the inclusive principle of human individuation, rather than its communal moment. Borges sees the suburbs of his native city as a collective unity ameliorating the existence of the isolated individual:

*Son para el solitario una promesa
porque millares de almas singulares las pueblan,
únicas ante Dios y en el tiempo
y sin duda preciosas.*⁶⁶

Here there is no hint of duplication: Borges poetic vision fixes on the uniqueness of human character in a paeon to individuality. These 'almas' are people ('alma' is used as a metonym in the same way as its English counterpart in "a city of one million *souls*") and as such, seem to be unique before God. Yet, in the next poem the mood has changed before the phenomenon of death, which one confronts as either the end of the individual, or its perpetuation in some extra-physical sense.⁶⁷ Set in the Cementerio de la Recoleta, and surrounded by the marble spectacle of death, Borges asserts that,

*sólo la vida existe.
El espacio y el tiempo son formas suyas,
son instrumentos mágicos del alma*⁶⁸

In these lines Borges defeats the individualising impulse of 'Las calles,' submerging human uniqueness in a communal life expressed as the phenomena of time and space. From this it follows that in extinguishing life, even in the case of individuals,

*se apagarán con ella el espacio, el tiempo y la muerte*⁶⁹

This suggests the ontological power of life as an individuating force. Without life, Borges the metaphysician appears now convinced, there can be no existential possibility for the individual 'soul' formerly unique before God and *in time*, as though contained by time as something all encompassing.

1.3.3 *The Importance of Intimacy*

If Borges personalises time at one opportunity in a religiously holistic vision, and abstracts it at another into a conceptual apparatus by which to illustrate the ontological dogma of eternal existence, its passage through *Fervor de Buenos Aires* demonstrates a remarkable syncretism. Borges uses it variously as a religious device to impart spiritual value, as a way of developing his philosophical ideas, and not least, as a talisman for the elicitation of intimacy in familiar surroundings.⁷⁰ It was this intimacy in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* that was recognised as its distinguishing feature by the *Ultraístas*, ensuring its favourable contemporary reception.⁷¹ An appreciation of intimacy is vital for our understanding of this originary work. This intimacy is the inscription in verse of the family's interior space as an artefact with symbolic importance, as the many poems that lovingly recreate the intimate space of balconies, parlours, interior courtyards suggest.⁷²

1.3.4 *Conflict Between Universality and Particularity: Managing Space*

Fervor de Buenos Aires presents the reader with a number of conceptual discrepancies. There is a shift between the universal and the local. Borges sees time both as a universal philosophical modality, and a fact of everyday experience. In 'Las calles' we see a discrepancy between Borges' idea that time could gather up the souls of a suburb at one time, and be extinguished with any one of them, at another. This begs the question of who was doing the gathering, and what would the human-like nature of a power that can only exist holistically be. Time, and God, and the Self are, I would suggest, logically mutually dependent. Each should exist like a point on a soap-bubble, any square centimetre of which must be intact to preserve the whole from a self-annihilating pop. Dividing these entities creates, as we shall see, a series of formal disjunctures which Borges works to reconcile, partly by simplifying them, and partly by ignoring them, in the subsequent verse collections.

Time, as well as God, exists not only as an ontological marker, but also as a field of force in Borges. He shifts his focus from the celestial to the terrestrial constantly. Not only the sleeping suburbs, and their analogue in the Recoleta cemetery, but even something as mundane as a card game can be used to signify mystic consequence. In 'El Truco' time, as an expression of will, departs, becoming replaced by colloquial time as the sensation of memory. In a description of friends playing the card game *truco* or trick, the card table becomes an enchanted domain where,

*En los lindes de la mesa
la vida de los otros se detiene.*⁷³

The miracle of recollection occurs by a recourse to the symbolic elements of two games; the one taking place upon the table, and the other taking place in human existence.⁷⁴ Here we see time is being used alternately by Borges in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* as a shifting marker of ontological introspection, rather than as a fixed concept of duration. In the first seven lines, before we learn the card table is capable of "suspending" life, the game itself operates to "displace" life, functioning as a simulacrum of ordinary existence. Borges suspends time and memory, and with them the phenomenal aspect of everyday life:

*Cuarenta naipes han desplazada la vida.
Pintados talismanes de cartón
nos hacen olvidar nuestros destinos
y una creación risueña
va poblando el tiempo robado
con las floridas travesuras
de una mitología casera.*⁷⁵

1.3.5 Willing the Displacement

Borges objectifies time here, dividing it from normal human experience by an act of willing displacement. The mythology of home and hearth rob Super-Objective time of its metaphysical power. He uses the time-sense of the temporarily distracted, such as when an hour slips past unnoticed, to describe an experiential split viewing progressive time against the background of its historical projection

into the past. Borges occupies the mid-point between protension and retension to centre time quasi-personally. He isolates Super-Objective time, to which we can make no appeal for clemency or understanding, from the poet's intimist perspective. Yet, the human is linked to the divine. He needs a *machina e deo* to connect these two spheres of life, and finds it in truco's mathematicality. Truco is existentially contingent, a theme Borges would use throughout his fictions. Once the pack is shuffled the cards are dealt in a vast, although mathematically limited, series.⁷⁶ No matter how chaotic the order seems to be, each game will have only so many moves and outcomes. Yet, the billions of possible combinations must logically recur at some time. Thus, in an analogue to the eternally recombining atoms of Epicurus and Lucretius that fashion all possible universes, an idea that his father introduced him to as a child, Borges describes truco as a symbol of innumerable life contingencies, forming and dissolving

*...como las alternativas del juego
se repiten y se repiten,*⁷⁷

Historical contingencies repeat themselves. The card game becomes a protective talisman for Borges' vision of the intermingling of personal life with history. But historical events and persons also obey the regimen of continual reproduction. The replicating game becomes ameliorated in 'El Truco' by the warmth recalling the dead past in its players' good-natured deceptions.⁷⁸ By reintroducing the element of human manipulation into the cold universe of pre-programmed contingency, Borges re-animates a mathematical exercise,

*hecho que resucita un poco, muy poco,
a las generaciones de los mayores
que legaron al tiempo de Buenos Aires
los mismos versos y las mismas diabluras.*⁷⁹

1.3.6 The Damming Metaphor - Logical Problems and Existential Solutions: Introducing Magic causality

References to familial security, even if of an unquestionably patriarchal kind,⁸⁰ figure so strongly in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* one might be excused for seeing the work as a psychologically projective exercise designed to recapture childhood certainties. Martin Stabb,

among others, has commented on the frequency with which Borges uses “conservational” metaphors (i.e. metaphors of detention) especially when describing time. Drawing on the *remanso* (damming-up) motif in poems such as ‘La Plaza de San Martín,’ ‘Cercanías,’ ‘Campos Atardecidos’ and ‘Sala Vacía’ and he comments: ‘[T]hough Borges’ fascination with time has often been interpreted as an example of a purely intellectual exercise, the very personal sources of this interest shouldn’t be overlooked. The traumatic return to Buenos Aires, as well as the essential inwardness of his personality, helps account for the emphasis on this theme in his early work.’⁸¹

While one can agree with Stabb that we shouldn’t discount the strong influence of biographical circumstances in shaping Borges’ work, it might be added that one needs be extremely careful in assigning them a *directly* causal effect. In Borges biography is seldom straightforward. While it’s tempting to see in the card-players, seated around their table immersed in a partially self-created world, the recapture of youthful first friendships (Borges tells us that in order to get to know two of his closest boyhood friends in Geneva he taught them how to play truco)⁸² the *remanso* motif functions too heterogeneously for simple interpretation. The manipulation of time by Borges is not a simple matter of slowing it down, or manipulating as though it were a physical device. The physical is one aspect of temporal manipulation in Borges, but his changing subject position also determines the contours and location of poetic temporality. Borges can, as it were, be said to slow time down in the ritual of the truco-players, but this leaves the question open of how he *logically* accomplishes it. At this stage it only provides a tenuous link to the later narratives of temporal manipulation, as in ‘The Secret Miracle’ and ‘The God’s Script’. Beyond the romantic conventionalities of this first poetry, Borges has a series of ideas about time and human perception disallowing monologic interpretation. While time is “dammed-up,” it’s also *detained*, the chief metaphor of temporal restraint in ‘El Truco.’ The metaphor also occurs in ‘La Recoleta,’ ‘Amanecer’ and ‘Sala Vacía’. However, whether it’s dammed or detained, Borges’ *attitude* to it is still one of syntactic differentiation.⁸³ In other words, it is the grammatical, rather than the poetical, use of the word time that determines its metaphoric use. The word time is something Borges manipulates as a symbolic phenomenon within determined linguistic bounds. Its function within the work is

determined by its formal value as a *verbal concept*. As corroboration I cite his own remarks on the operative principle of magic causality, a principle that I argue is at the heart of Borges' work, and towards which he was working to elucidate even at this early stage of his career. Discussing the way metaphor is used in narrative, he distinguishes between two classes of causality; the natural but chaotic, and a syntactically ordered magic:

*He distinguido dos procesos causales: el natural, que es el resultado incesante de incontables e infinitas operaciones; el mágico, donde profetizan los pormenores, lúcido y limitado. En la novela pienso que la única posible honradez está con el segundo. Quede el primero para la simulación psicológica.*⁸⁴

Magic causality's lucidity, at the level of linguistic operations, is determined by the grammatical constraints of word-use within a syntactic structure. Borges had already hinted at this use in 'El Truco' when he portrays the possible outcomes of the cards as representing life possibilities. In other words, the core of Borges' theory of linguistic relations depends on an acceptance of the formal values of words, their usual syntactic capability, as constituting their conceptual application.⁸⁵ Borges sees grammatical usage as fundamental to conceptual formation.

The concept of such a time is indifferent to the influence of emotional content. While it's true the time motif plays an important part in Borges' poetry, we can view it as analytically distinct from the emotional aspects of his work. We can also distinguish between an overly biographical account of Borges' childhood influences on his later production, and a more interactive account that sees biographical events as only one element in his philosophical development. This interaction helps to mould his thinking about problems that revolve around the four ontological concerns already described. As such my account is modular, and not completely literary. In demarcating between poetic use and grammatical use of the term time, I have been able to distinguish where Borges is using the word time as 1), an idiomatic term describing an interval of duration, and 2), as a concept that describes his own perceptions of his *relation* to time as a fact of experience within a frame of self-awareness (Quasi-Personal Time), and 3), as a personification of a

historical process externalised as a religious deity (Super-Objective Time).

1.3.7 The Little Act of Personal Accommodation in Fervor de Buenos Aires

If one distinguishes time from emotion, or by its conceptual use as a symbol of self-awareness, how then can the poetry of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* ever present a unified picture of Borges as a poet of the eerie philosophical investigations that have made his name in contemporary criticism? While the move is doubtful from the standpoint of idiomatic use, its justification lies in an intrinsic tension between Borges' ideas of time as either manipulable or indifferent to human control. If time is indifferent to the individual, then personal entreaties to it will be fruitless. They're even faintly blasphemous, since he invests time with a quasi-religious sense of awe. This is clearly the case in 'Las calles'. But if time is thought of as manageable in some way, then the act of management must reasonably be thought to have some end in sight. However, in the context in which I place Borges' use of the word, manipulating time seems to have no other aim than the perpetuation of personal identity through variations of subject-position.⁸⁶ However, within a quasi-religious framework of Borges' recognition of multiple identity, how could perpetuating *one* identity be construed as anything but vanity? The poet is on the horns of a dilemma: if time is indifferent to human control, then this signals the end of his identity - the poet must die, and his several selves with him. Not even the page will be able to perpetuate it, since the page is a sensually under-determined record: the word, and the thing the word represents, only exist as conventions of association.⁸⁷ Conversely, if time can't serve the purposes of personal continuation that the poet seems to require in 'El Truco,' where time is suspended within the confines of the card table, then his attempt to perpetuate personal identity must be construed as an attempt to become more than human, i.e. divine.⁸⁸ Human, or more than human, Borges' poetic subjectivity must be ontologically modified if it is to sustain itself.

Nowhere does this tension better appear than in what I call a little act of personal accommodation titled 'Sala Vacía' ('Empty Parlour') where, although time is recognised as personally untrappable, the emotionality of the effort is transferred to the concrete apparatus of

personal recollection: the furnishings and photographs of a familiar but 'empty' room where,

*Los muebles de caoba perpetúan
entre la indecisión del brocado
su tertulia de siempre.*⁸⁹

and

*Los daguerrotipos
mienten su falsa cercanía
de tiempo detenido en un espejo.*⁹⁰

The intimacy suggested by the familiar surroundings of a front parlour freezes in an instant: Borges uses the signals by which we recognise time as a manageable substance to undo our idea of the past.⁹¹ Time's tokens, like the deliquescing photographs on a parlour wall, aren't the *consumers* of memory, but the name by which memory labels past events, causing its 'false proximity' to be held forth for examination:

*...y ante nuestro examen se pierden
como fechas inútiles
de borrosos aniversarios.*⁹²

Time here is solidly beyond the control of individuals, yet by portraying this frozen interior Borges recreates its powers of personal familiarity as poetic counterpoint, fomenting a tension between persistence and decay. In the midst of the corrosions of memory represented by the fading brocaded sofas and the half-forgotten photographic tableaux, the mahogany furniture 'perpetuates' the empty room as if holding it together against the ravages of time. Into such a charged atmosphere steps childhood memory, the one image this petrified interior requires to assuage the tension between life and death through the symbolic reconciliation of opposite forces. 'For a long time,' Borges explains that,

*...sus angustiadas voces nos buscan
y ahora apenas están*

*en las mañanas iniciales de nuestra infancia.*⁹³

Only by a recourse to an image of beginnings, rather than endings, can Borges rescue the stultifying introspection of his 'Empty Parlour'. One might liquidate this moribund environ, where time suspends itself through the amulets inhabiting it, by introducing revivifying imagery. But Borges avoids this tactic by recourse to images of the outer streetscape, probably as a concession to the proletarianism then boiling-over into the Boedo-Florida controversy.⁹⁴ Time, as the persistence of memory, may be trapped within the bubble-chamber tracing the ghostly lines of its atomic progress, but the other time, that which is indifferent to human control and exists beyond recollection's power, is waiting to obtrude. If the 'Sala Vacía' acts as a metaphor of decaying memory through a process amounting to recollective inbreeding (the bloodline of the bourgeois family maintaining itself through its preservation of the mouldering daguerreotypes), then that other ambit of memory, the street, functions as a direct and exteriorising contrast:

*La luz del día de hoy
exalta los cristales de la ventana
desde la calle de clamor y de vértigo
y arrincona y apaga la voz lacia
de los antepasados.*⁹⁵

However, the reconciliation is not completely successful. The impersonal time of photographs and anniversaries, and the personal time of contemporary human activity, don't completely mesh through the medium of childhood reflection. One sees the four informing elements of Borges' own childhood in 'Sala Vacía', but only *in embryo* and with important omissions. The twin lives of the parlour-interior and the mirror replicate each other (duplication of identity) becoming trapped in a mutual effort of phenomenal reciprocation, but each has nowhere else to go, suggesting the *implausibility of motion* through the *recursiveness of human memory*.⁹⁶ On the other hand, the perpetuating furniture acts against the idea that human identity duplicates itself given a suitable environment where it can 'take on [its] very voice' in an act of reproduction.⁹⁷ In such circumstances an effort to conserve the identity of individual occurrences, which is the

implication of these lines, is impossible. Borges also ignores seriality, or at best he suggests it *in absentia* by the petrification of this occluded environment. Mirror-relations exist in a “closed-loop” giving no hint of escape, hence the necessity of an obtrusion from the ‘clamorous, vertiginous street’ to introduce a revivifying chaos.

1.3.8 Quasi-Historical Poetic Situation in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*

As we have seen, Borges’ attempt to find a way of reconciling the opposing forces of historical time and personal time, and with them, supramundane and earthly existence, is only partially successful in ‘Sala Vacía.’ However, he persists with the theme of the soul’s continuous, but evanescent, existence in the *momento mori* that constitutes a quasi-historical dimension, in other pieces in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. ‘La Recoleta’ and the two Inscripción poems (‘Inscripción Sepulcral’ and ‘Inscripción en Cualquier Sepulcro’) for example, establish a strong counter-theme of continuous non-personal existence. While Borges wanders around the tombs and headstones of the Cementerio de la Recoleta, speculating on the beautiful sepulchres with their («desnudo latín y las trabadas fechas fatales»)⁹⁸ an image that vividly recalls the impotent and fading daguerreotypes of ‘Sala Vacía’, his thoughts are always drawn to the possibility of the soul’s salvational deliquescence, of an «alma que se dispersa en otras almas» as a mystic defeat of death. Dying, like time, is a serious matter for Borges, but its earthly remedy in the paraphernalia of tombs and photographs and literature, is obviously a feeble stopgap. Eventually everything must be forgotten, including all our lives. The scantiness of the inscriptions on the graves in La Recoleta can’t disguise the obvious:

*No arriesgue el mármol temerario
gárrulas transgresiones al todopoder del olvido,
enumerando con prolijidad
el nombre, la opinión, los acontecimientos, la patria.*⁹⁹

However, even if the life of the flesh with its «trémula esperanza, el milagro implacable del dolor y el asombro del goce»¹⁰⁰ can’t withstand sensual oblivion, the ‘logical’ soul of the philosopher, less personality than idea, consoles a time that is becoming less the plaything of card-

players and parlour-bound elderly women, and more an Objectivity beyond the reach of earthly placation:

*Ciegamente reclama duración el alma arbitraria
cuando la tiene asegurada en vidas ajenas,
cuando tú mismo eres el espejo y la réplica
de quienes no alcanzaron tu tiempo
y otros serán (y son) tu inmortalidad en la tierra.*¹⁰¹

Not even the execrations of Argentine liberal sentiment for a famous and long dead dictator (Juan Manuel de Rosas)¹⁰² can defuse Borges' suspicions of a soul persisting through a transmigrational conspiracy of personal reproduction, a major theme in the idea of Borges' 'universal history' where the *character* of an originally historical person survives, being reproduced down through the ages. In the poem 'Rosas' we see an avatar for such diverse personages: a political bully with delusions of grandeur. The deceased tyrant, now mythologised as monstrous legend, becomes the subject of hushed conversation amongst white-upholstered mahogany furniture:

*En la sala tranquila
cuyo reloj austero derrama
un tiempo ya sin aventuras ni asombro
sobre la decente blancura
que amortaja la pasión roja de la caoba,
algun, como reproche cariñoso,
pronunció el nombre familiar y temido.*¹⁰³

1.3.9 Uncontrollable Time

Whatever the biographical factors prompting Borges to pen it (he himself was a distant relative of the legendary political thug),¹⁰⁴ he uses the poem to further consolidate his vision of time as an uncontrollable phenomenon, oblivious to human intervention. Time 'spills out' of a clock like tea out of a tea-pot, filling whatever 'cup' may be beneath it. Time has become objectified as a universal phenomenon, and with it the existence of the individual soul dilutes itself in a vast stream of events drastically reducing the value of personal existence:

*Hoy el olvido borra su censo de muertes,
 porque son venales las muertes
 si las pensamos como parte del Tiempo,*¹⁰⁵

Time here is not only beyond the control of individuals, but even beyond the control of the gods ending their line stretching in a parallel temporality throughout time's 'indefatigable immortality'

*...que anonada con silenciosa culpa las razas
 y en cuya herida siempre abierta
 que el último dios habrá de restañar el último día,
 cabe toda la sangre derramada.*¹⁰⁶

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 1.4

Having, through the technique of substitutional analysis, established some of the aporias and rational accommodations that Borges seems to make in his earliest poetry, I advance a reading of Fervor de Buenos Aires as a propositional complex, constituting a series of philosophical problems that Borges must work out via his developing poetic subjectivity. These form a complex of propositional standpoints that must be reincorporated within the poetic work. Because Borges endows Time as God with some human traits, this abstraction becomes a synthetic unity of human-like psycho-cognitive facilities. This is the first non-personal causal agent in his work. Borges rejects psychological description because cognition is conditionally operative through the forms in which it manifests itself, and there need be no other means of explaining it. He sees metaphoric relations between words as illustrative of general symbolic operation. For Borges the author is seen as the manipulator of a repertoire of symbolic effects, thus obviating the need for intrusive psychoanalytical explanation.

1.4 Formal Motivation

Reading Fervor de Buenos Aires as a Propositional Complex

So far I have established a case for a reading of Borges' use of time as a word signifying an idiomatic use, a personal use, and an extra-personal use. The idiomatic use of the word is relatively unproblematic, fulfilling the function of an unspecific marker of duration. Consequently, I have argued its location is of minimal importance for a reading of his work seeking to identify the poet's attitude to time as fundamental for an account of his intellectual and philosophical development. The other two senses identify the poet's evolving division of time into an inter-subjective state of awareness. He initially pictures it as an undifferentiated and universal phenomenon; a time that, with space, goes to form all souls, these souls then dispersing and dissolving into other souls, etc. However, he also develops a more personal view, externalising time as a quasi-divine characterisation, as a time appealed-to as though it were possessed of rationality.¹⁰⁷

Borges' views on the connection between time and personal identity are crucial to an understanding of the *Fictions* as a series of attempts to express his 'ontological unease.' As we have seen, the earliest expression of this project centres on two distinct uses of the word time - firstly, as a universal phenomenon including the poet, and secondly, as a particular and externalised phenomenon to which personal appeals can be made. But Borges would seem to be constructing, as though by default, a dichotomous perception of time as a universal but impersonal phenomenon, *and* as a personalised but equally universal deity. Obviously both cannot exist at the same time without Borges further theorising the conditions in which either is more suitable to his mode of poetic expression on a particular occasion. It is to this dichotomy between anthropomorphism and pantheism that we now turn.

1.4.1 *Anthropomorphism and Pantheism: Revealing the Life of Objects*

Super-Objective Time, then, seems not so much the focus for a peculiar pantheistic cosmology in Borges, but as a means of perpetuating an anthropomorphic viewpoint. Pantheism, the viewpoint that there is a divine presence in all things, connects with a special range of logical conditions functioning independently of personal belief,¹⁰⁸ forming the basis of the conceptually “formal” aspect of Borges’ literary composition. Gene Bell-Villada has called this a ‘substitute for the machinery of motivational analysis’¹⁰⁹ which, as he notes, Todorov characterises as ‘imaginary causality.’¹¹⁰ In this case the theme of a universal and immanent deity (TimeGod) operates through those emblems (the dictator Rosas, mouldering mahogany furniture in a frusty drawing room, etc.) constituting its particularity as phenomenon.¹¹¹ Borges was to clarify this anti-psychological aesthetic process in a later essay as one relying on a strictly causal *reductio*: the images of a story that constantly recur are structurally constitutive. Drawing on Stéphane Mallarmé in a discussion of Poe’s ‘The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,’ to cite one prominent example, he is able to isolate the main motivational plank, theorising its agonistic rationale: «El secreto argumento de esa novel es el temor y la vilificación de lo blanco »:¹¹²

*Nombrar un objeto, dicen que dijo Mallarmé, es suprimir las tres cuartas del goce del poema, que reside en la felicidad de ir adivinando; el sueño es sugerirlo.*¹¹³

Borges first read the French Symbolists as an adolescent during the First World War in Geneva.¹¹⁴ Attracted to Mallarmé in particular, he evolved an immanentist position from the theory that poetry is a process of revelation rather than construction.¹¹⁵ Attacking the classic approach taken by the Parnassians, Mallarmé’s revelatory theory allows poetic meaning to emerge from the page with the minimum of discursive manipulation. One has simply to allow the purity of human emotion to be described and the sense of the work establishes itself: «lá, il y a symbole, il y a création, et le mot poésie a ici son sens».¹¹⁶

1.4.2 *Borges’ Rejection of Psychological Description*

This method also has clearly negative implications for the portrayal of character through psychological description. If the word is the vehicle

of meaning, then logically all one has to do is arrange words and stand back, assured the symbols they evoke will emerge.¹¹⁷ For Mallarmé, this emergence, «consiste non à prendre à la peinture ses moyens, pour montrer la forme extérieure des choses, mais à disséquer les motifs de l'âme humaine. Mais il y a, entre cela et la poésie, la même différence qu'il y a entre un corset et une belle-gorge...»¹¹⁸ Poetic verisimilitude is therefore determined by the poet's sensitivity to the particular voice of the work. «Les choses existent, nous n'avons pas à les créer; nous n'avons qu'à en saisir les rapports».¹¹⁹ Of Edgar Allan Poe, whose Tales he translated for a French audience, Mallarmé maintains that the author's greatness rests not on a philosophical basis, but on his ability to allow the 'imprisoned' song to emerge. This had certainly also been the aim for Baudelaire, whose earlier translations of Poe introduced the Parnassians to a new, and shocking, dimension in narrative. Such a process is clearly beyond the reach of artifice, which accounts for its purity: «L'armature intellectuelle du poème se dissimule et tient - a lieu - dans l'espace qui isole les strophes et parmi le blanc du papier».¹²⁰ Borges, in his essay on narrative art and magic, a work obviously influenced by his reading of the Symbolists, likewise criticises expository psychologism, but this time expresses the further conviction that it is altogether impossible to accurately render the psyche through intellectual description.¹²¹ One must rely, at the level of description, for the play of images that will lead to an inescapable conclusion. This conclusion will be the governing metaphor for the work of art, against which every event and action takes place as if by the laws of determinism.¹²² This symbolic, or 'magical' causality, emerges through lucidly placed details foreshadowing an ineluctable conclusion.¹²³

1.4.3 Self-Situation as Self-Discovery: Agency of Metaphor

Thus, the play of images determines a tale's outcome (the action-principle so beloved of adventure tales and thrillers), and I claim that this formal methodology has its beginnings in Borges' earliest literary production. Such a case is sustainable from the point of view of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* if one takes a developmental approach, allowing Borges' ontological unease to show through under his efforts to establish an intimate rapport with the limits constituting being. Individual ontology is either within, or without, time. In Borges it's both on different occasions, his need to establish individual being on the

principle of one's *orientation* to time being crucial. The poems of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* are obviously less amenable to Borges' idea of magical causality, owing to their more compact structure, an organising strategy easily visible in the *ficciones*. The main theme Borges introduces in a story like 'The South,' for example, is too complex for such treatment. It can not only be read along a surface narrative line (the clerk is challenged by a hoodlum and dies bravely defending himself), but as submerged narrative where the clerk experiences the knife-duel as a fantasy of valour, while dying during a surgical operation. Borges incorporates reality into a dream-scenario, thereby establishing its symbolic dimension. Clearly, such extended paranarrativity can't be fully developed in the space of forty lines of verse, the average length of the pieces in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Nor should it be, since it was never Borges' aim to produce narratives masquerading as poetry, but to remain within predetermined structural bounds. Reality, therefore, can't be known through literature, the best we can do is to construct an artistically satisfying version of it.¹²⁴ In his own words,

*...me propuse demasiados fines: remedar ciertas fealdades (que me gustaban) de Miguel de Unamuno, ser un escritor español del siglo diecisiete, ser Macedonio Fernández, descubrir las metáforas que Lugones ya había descubierto, cantar un Buenos Aires de casas bajas y, hacia el poniente o hacia el sur, de quintas con verjas.*¹²⁵

Although there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Borges' mission statement (more than once he describes his attraction for the city, his love of the poetry of the seventeenth century, of Quevedo and Góngora and Unamuno, his friendship with Macedonio Fernández),¹²⁶ certain elements can be privileged for the weight they lend to my thesis attempting an "archaeology" of Borges' thematic development.¹²⁷ The reference to Lugones' metaphors is especially interesting, for example, not so much because of Lugones himself, but because Borges is very clearly aiming to *rediscover* [descubrir] them. Such recapitulation is crucial for Borges' poetics. Beyond the sheer egoistic pleasure of discovering unconscious plagiarism, it foreshadows one of Borges' most powerful philosophic thoughts; artistic creation as the eternal rearrangement of a certain limited conceptual vocabulary:

*Quizá la historia universal es la historia de la diversa entonaciones de algunas metáforas.*¹²⁸

Even if Borges was to later restate this thought, the apparent paucity of its new vocabulary gives it a greater power for being more indeterminate:

*I think that there are but few metaphors. We have, for example, time and the river, living and dreaming, sleeping and dying, the eye and the stars. These should be sufficient.*¹²⁹

1.4.4 Productive Tensions Between Modalities

However, Borges was to also reverse the status of author as producer of text, by claiming the repertoire of stock effects embodied in his tiny collection of metaphors (the 'bag of tricks' as he called them) possesses an essential quality. 'They are not arbitrary,' he declares, 'I have not chosen them, they have chosen me.'¹³⁰ We can read these essential metaphors developing from a body of poetic text in such a way that *Fervor de Buenos Aires* becomes an originary moment. It may be no leap of faith to find Borges' most famous metaphors locked in the substratum of a rather obscure collection of verse. Thus, by also uncovering their functional conditions, and identifying the situations where they surface, we will read the later works as a series of resonant semiotic environments.

Thus, returning to 'Rosas', with its heavy reliance on Quasi-Personal Time, we see a tension developing between the nominative and vocative modalities of the word.¹³¹ Time in the nominative case is a general and all-inclusive concept of the imagination, while Quasi-Personal Time is positioned outside the imagination as a personalised entity to which the poet makes his grandiloquent appeals. Although Rosas is the target of historical acrimony his symbolic location as a focus for execration has become ambiguous in the eyes of the poet: 'I don't know,' says Borges, 'if Rosas was only a thirsty dagger as my grandparents used to say', or merely 'one fact among other facts'.¹³² A Rosas absolved of personal responsibility for his crimes is obviously a trans-historical subject.¹³³ Because he occurs as a symbolic persona, Rosas functions as an emblematic presence around which Borges can gather the threads of an important and fundamental idea:

historical persons represent ontological realities continuously played and replayed throughout a time divesting itself of human individuation. Thus, the Rosas of political history and the 'Rosas' of the poem are reconciled through Borges' recasting of History as Destiny. Within the field of destiny the historical becomes imbued with causal geneticism: Rosas has been awaiting his crimes, and his commination, a narrative reverse Borges would employ in transplanting the Grendel myth in *Beowulf* to pre-classical Crete for 'The House of Asterion'.¹³⁴ Borges accommodates his need for the familiar - forming such a strong element in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, with its frequent allusion to favourite interiors and streets - by fusing the ontological realm with the historical realm through their cohabitation within the ambit of intimate association.¹³⁵ The old people's memories of the dictator are hazy and uncertain, but it's these memories that help perpetuate Rosas as both historical entity and emblematic persona, a feat of the intimist magic Borges suggests as our own contribution to the history of eternity:

*Ya Dios lo habrá olvidado
y es menos una injuria que una piedad
demorar su infinita disolución
con limosnas de odio.*¹³⁶

Borges' self-situation to a time conceived independently of events functions as a means for trans-historically recreating the subject.¹³⁷ Even God has forgotten Rosas, so he's presumably free to float in folk consciousness beyond the execrations of his earthly victims. This meta-temporal projection can be viewed in the context of the four thematic categories of ontological unease, elaborating a "genetic" understanding of Borges' ontological concerns. Time is a functional plurality in Borges. Shifting between Objective and Super-Objective modalities, Borges creates a quasi-personal persona through which he can broaden his understanding of time as a particular and universal phenomenon. Time, however, is only one concern in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Borges' preoccupation with time is given a structural armature by his frequent allusions to the geometry of place, and this provides temporality with its physical dimension. It is to space as a concept in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, and the two volumes of poetry that succeed it *Luna de enfrente* and *Cuaderno de San Martín* that we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO

Space in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, *Luna de enfrente* and *Cuaderno de San Martín*: Metaphysical Reconciliations

The Comparative Simplicity of Space

So far I have attempted to isolate time as a critical concept in Borges' early poetry. However, Borges also uses space to signal the position of the poet within the poetic environment. Indeed, the foregoing discussion of time relies on a spatialisation of temporality where the poet places himself either within or without its bounds. Whereas it was essential to differentiate between the Grammatical, Objective and Super-Objective use of the word, spatial metaphor in the early poetry can be approached in a more straightforward manner. Where it was previously necessary to isolate the senses of the word time to draw out distinctions that could aid in the isolation of a principle of ontological differentiation, and the subsequent tracing of this principle in his later theory, this need is not imperative in the case of space. Borges uses the word "space" in its conventional sense throughout his literary production (and indeed seems to view it as unproblematic, a substance for either division or transition), where the poet is always a unitary entity whose perceptions enter into no ambiguities of inter-subjectivity. This is demonstrated by the fact that even where Borges entertains fantasies of duplication, as in the case of looking into a mirror as a child, it is always an ontologically complete individual that is being duplicated, never some product of the interaction itself. In other words, where Borges' use of the word time implies a modal, or inter-subjective, relationship, "space" implies only some gross modification (multiplication, transection, etc.) of *complete* entities. In this chapter I argue it is this unwitting simplification by Borges of the ontological status of the individual leading to aporia that must be resolved by embracing metaphysical and historical fallacies of human existence.

To facilitate the study of space in Borges' writing a geometry of space and place has been developed based on the following divisions:

1. *Objective Space - divisible space: a general spatial marker*
2. *Super-Objective Space - indivisible universal spatiality*
3. *Place - any geometricisation of Objective Space*
4. *Intimate Space - familiar interiors*
5. *Social Space - familiar exteriors*
6. *TimeSpace - interplay of spaces, places and Quasi-Personal Time*

Space is not an analogue to Time in the early poetry, although Borges uses the word space grammatically, commonsensically (Objective Space), and as a super-personal addressee (Super-Objective Space). Eschewing the cold impartiality of the Super-Objective, he develops a poetics of place derived from the interplay of these uses. He reconciles his position as a subject "between" Objective and Super-Objective Space by occupying an intimist perspective. Intimism can be seen as a rejection of metaphysical aporia for a revaluation of the human. Places are always human artefacts fashioned by social relationships, sentiment and memories, while space is impersonal and philosophically abstract. Borges, as poetic addressor, reconciles his divided subject-position (TimeGod) by recourse to reinvesting the world of the commonplace with a reality that rescues it from metaphysical abstraction (TimeSpace). This is the major development that he makes in the later poetry; by avoiding the eternally spiralling series of externalisations in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, Borges returns to the world.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 2.1

Blindness constitutes a Borgesian motif that signals his withdrawal from the world and concentration on the creation of a repertoire of fictive emblems. These emblems are a formal response to Borges' exposure to the philosophical problems which beset Fervor de Buenos Aires. Borges is still interested in the intimacy of interiors, transferring his impotence before a time that is always beyond his reach, to an interior that can be poetically manipulated. Uneasy in the urban environment, yet still haunted by his metaphysical preoccupations, Borges becomes a liminal character, an anti-flâneur. Borges unites this dichotomy in an act of poetic apprehension - Radical Subjective Idealism. Yet, he is unable to completely divest himself of his fears, his poems never being quite within a unitary genre. Borges introduces the "demiurge" as a symbolic mediator between the intellectual and romantic aspects of his poetry. His experiments in genre signal a new awareness of the manifold implications of the mixed mode of poetic representation. Using the motifs of entwining and enfolding space, Borges creates an early representation for the labyrinths that will inform his later work.

2.1 *Geometry of Subjectivity*

Geometry appears to provide no particular problems of grammatical location in Borges. However, its presence seems to signal a new modality of inter-subjectivity, that of the subject as an objective being in a physical universe, but also as a percipient of an objective world which, because it's the product of perception, is somehow always other to an interior sense of unitary selfhood. Unlike time, whose presence and activity can be plotted taking into account an "idiomatic" lexicography of those events marking duration - and Borges' individual positioning of the historical and personal - the geometry of place appears to be universally recognisable and available to sensual description. While individual features require some biographical annotation, the description and interrelation of houses, streets and plazas obviously presents no problems to anyone with normal eyesight who has encountered them. This, of course, is the point. Anyone reading the early poems against the background of the later works is impressed by the extraordinary visuality of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Borges became blind, but the condition didn't affect him drastically until the mid-1950s. Before this time his eyesight had been slowly deteriorating, blindness coming in his own words 'like a slow summer twilight'.¹³⁸ It's reasonable to conjecture the evolution from visual description in Borges' work to metaphorical description came as the result of Borges' failing eyesight. The external world became less important to him than the internal one he was constructing, composed of the re-readings of his favourite works, a strategy remarked upon as early as 1928.¹³⁹

2.1.1 Blindness? Insight?

Although this theory has much to recommend it, it assumes Borges' physicality conditions his poeticality. While no one can doubt the importance of his failing eyesight as an impetus for his increasingly recursive reading schedule, I would claim it couldn't have been the recognition of blindness alone that is responsible for his centripetal literariness, since blindness itself does not figure as anything but an occasional reference in the *fictions*. Borges' characters are nearly always fully sighted. Indeed, they see rather too well on occasion, as in the case of 'Funes the Memorius' whose obsession with naming space-time events as discrete entities is facilitated by a better than average optical perspicuity. Their dilemmas emerge as ontological concerns of individuality and memory rather than the mere physicality of sightlessness.¹⁴⁰

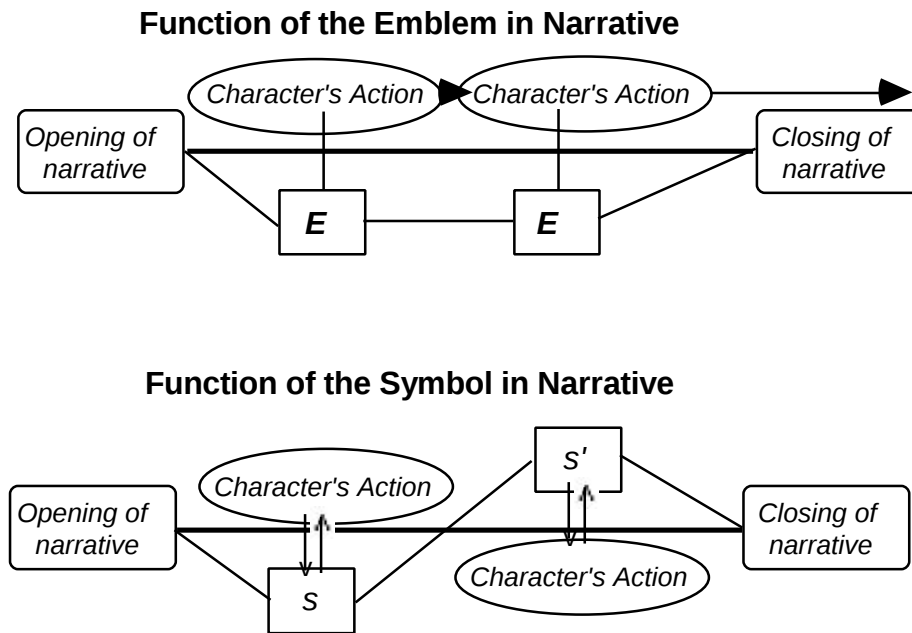
Borges claims not to have really noticed his condition until it made its presence felt in 1955 when he was director of the National Library and the spines of the books around him swirled into grey anonymity. However, certain features of his childhood make one suspect this moment of visual degeneration accomplished an event he'd been preparing for most of his life. We know the reason the family left for Switzerland in 1914 was so his father Guillermo could seek a consultation with a Genevan eye-specialist to ameliorate the hereditary condition eventually claiming the sight of both his paternal grandmother and his great-grandfather whom both died, Borges informs us, 'blind and smiling'.¹⁴¹ What might it have been like for Borges the child of eight or nine, whose father had begun introducing abstruse philosophical problems to him centering on the fallibility of identity and matter, to have inherited the legend of the family blindness? The mahogany furniture sitting at the centre of his deathly still interiors in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* affected the boy deeply, becoming associated with a now famous Borgesian motif, the mirror as an image of duplication:

*I always stood in fear of mirrors. When I was a little boy, there was something awful at my house. In my room we had three full-length mirrors. Then also the furniture was mahogany, and that made a kind of dark mirror, like the mirror to be found in Saint Paul's epistle. I stood in fear of them, but being a child I did not dare say anything. So every night I was confronted by three or four images of myself.*¹⁴²

2.1.2 *The Life of Emblems*

One may ask if the paradoxes of identity revealed to Borges as a child by his father's readings from Berkeley and Zeno were not partially responsible for the accentuation of a fairly normal childhood anxiety into an intellectual preoccupation with which Borges would work throughout his writing career. However, one can seldom chart a direct line of succession from childhood experience to the projects of maturity. The genetic thesis, although evident in the appearance of the mirror as a symbol of duplication (see 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'), can't account for the *absence* of mirrors in so much of his later work. I would argue however, that this absence assumes no Freudian dimension as a symbol of repression. Its absence is not necessarily its suppression, nor when it appears does it function through a negative economy of transmutation. Even though the adventures of Alice through the looking glass have been successfully appropriated by psychological interpretation, the mirrors in Borges are neither gates to another world, nor instruments serving, like the shattered mirror in the fairy-story of Snow White, to fragment the evil Queen's power in a silvery cascade of self-mockery. Rather it's an *emblem* whose identity is absolutely transparent, and whose character is preserved throughout a narrative intact, its intermittent appearance and disappearance serving to manipulate the reading imagination.¹⁴³ In Borges there is almost no symbolism, since one thing seldom *stands for* anything else. Rather, Borges uses emblems as imagic wholes; their reception, avoidance, or acceptance, by characters in a narrative is the "message" of the text.¹⁴⁴ It's this "life of emblems" that constitutes the mechanism of narrative causality in Borges, but it's a mechanism informed by a substratum of philosophical investigation. It's even not going too far to argue for the utter superfluity of the narrative as such in a *fiction*, since the substance of the story could be paraphrased as an article for a philosophical journal. The difference between emblem and symbol is represented in the following diagram:

Diagram 7



It will be seen in the diagram depicting the function of the symbol in narrative that what is crucial is the interaction of the character with the symbol. The symbol is the outward show of some inner psychic process that the character, in being exposed to it, must accommodate and transform in some way, this transformation serving as the cause for the next plot development: $s \rightarrow s'$. This is the reading of the symbol as loosely psychological in Barthes, and all fiction predicated on an implicit life of the mind of its characters, where it functions as a means for the character to gain special insights into a narrative situation not immediately available within his or her ordinary narrative environment.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, in the Borgesian narrative there is only minimal interaction between the emblem and the actions of the characters. The emblem functions rather as a hint than an imperative to act which the characters notice from time to time, but which seems to play no major part in the plot until the closing of the narrative when it's revealed as the *underlying cause* for the action. This is what Borges means when he describes magic causality as the operation of 'lucid and limited' narrative elements whose appearance is 'prophetic' instead of symbolic.¹⁴⁶ A prophetic element need not symbolise anything other than itself. Its operation as a physical thing, or a

collection of physical attributes, is the key to its meaning. Thus, by a relatively transparent analysis, we decipher the text as the vehicle for the operation of the emblem as such.¹⁴⁷ In the following discussion we'll attempt to demonstrate a plausible means for the development in Borges' early poetry of such a theory of narrative elementalism through a combination of cultural, ideological and etymological analysis. The situation of the poet within his environment is critical for such an understanding.

2.1.3 *Plasticity and Intimacy*

The poet of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* is as much the poet of plastic time as of intimate interiors. The mahogany furniture of childhood, now imbued with sinister reflective qualities, populates youth's captured places. From the mysterious dark furniture perpetuating an afternoon tea, its 'red passion' stifled by the decent white brocade of 'Sala Vacía,' to the 'deep bedrooms where mahogany quietly burns' glimpsed in 'Cercanías' ('Outskirts'), to an afternoon settling in the Plaza de San Martín like 'fine burnished mahogany' Borges' preoccupation with time is given a sensual dimension by his frequent allusions to the geometry of place. Although time's union with place is a developing theme throughout *Fervor de Buenos Aires* the fusion of temporality with geometry is first convincingly portrayed as an idea in 'Caminata' ('Pilgrimage'). Because of the multiplicity of its images I will explore it before returning to examine the submerged elements contributing to it. Here we have the nocturnal Borges walking the streets he loves, a recurrent image. Just under half the pieces of the 1974 edition invoke the night. He is alone, as befits the night bird, and the outlying streets exist in a curious tension between urban and agricultural space:

*Olorosa como un mate curado
la noche acerca agrestes lejanías
y despeja las calles
que acompañan mi soledad,
hechas de vago miedo y de largas líneas.*¹⁴⁸

2.1.4 *Borges in the Modern World*

The unease produced by the conflicting image of familial security and nebulous fear in the second and fifth lines respectively is uncommon in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, where Borges usually welcomes the night

street as an ally of the poet's need for cleansing solitude. As Beatriz Sarlo notes in *Jorge Luis Borges: Writer on the Edge*, the idea of the city as social space was a relatively recent development in Argentine cultural life; as recently as thirteen years before this work the city had celebrated a centennial inaugurated by a building and modernisation programme.¹⁴⁹ The rural and uncouth Buenos Aires of José Hernández's gaucho Martín Fierro had given way to cosmopolitan space, and the port-city 'as a voracious centripetal machine emptying the rest of the country' became a symbol of industrial modernism.¹⁵⁰ Certainly the twenty-four year old Borges of *Fervor* was keenly aware of the tremendous drive to transform the city into an urban metropolis, and the part of him thriving in dim seclusion rejected it, creating the perambulist as *anti-flâneur* seeking intimate space instead of the anonymous bustle of the cultivated urbanite.¹⁵¹ Here the city, as the sum of its physical effects of road works and city buildings, is tempered and revived, even menaced, by its rural surroundings, where,

*La brisa trae corazonadas de campo,
dulzura de las quintas, memorias de los álamos
que harán temblar bajo rigideces de asfalt
la detenida tierra viva
que oprime el peso de las casas.*¹⁵²

We have seen this portrayal of physical tension already in 'El Truco', but whereas,

*En los lindes de la mesa
la vida de los otros se detiene*¹⁵³

this displacement of time is achieved as an act of diversion rather than as an effort of will. Borges' aim in 'Caminata' is to describe the conditions where human life can affect the blind progress of the universe, which lies entombed beneath its «cóncava sombra» into which «los relojes de la medianoche magnífica» pour out «un tiempo vasto y generoso».¹⁵⁴ Here time is suspended but one gets no sense the poet is standing outside it. All the metaphors used are those of close physical presence; the breeze carries the «corazonadas» or 'impulses' of the fields.¹⁵⁵ The living earth presses up the houses that imprison it, even the night is described as 'feline' in a gesture of Latin

machismo that transfers to the seductiveness of the prostitutes on their enclosed balconies «que en la tarde mostraron la notoria esperanza».¹⁵⁶ Yet, time here is equivocal. While on the one hand it's vast and generous, its breadth of existence is tempered by a hidden intentionality.¹⁵⁷ Time, as an expression of some concealed and all-powerful will, is

*...un tiempo caudaloso
donde todo soñar halla cabida;
tiempo de anchura de alma, distinto
de los avaros términos que miden
las tareas del día.*¹⁵⁸

2.1.5 Borges and RSI

Borges is “within” this time as much as he can be. The whole effort of the poem has been to create an environment where he can subsist by means of presentational and spatial metaphors. Borges creates a poetic relationship between mind and world that produces a unique revelation. When it comes it fulfils the only destiny it can, that of solipsism's highest intellectual moment, Radical Subjective Idealism (RSI).¹⁵⁹ Time and the world combine in the person of Borges' apprehension, without which neither could survive alone:

*Yo soy el único espectador de esta calle;
si dejara de verla se moriría.*¹⁶⁰

Whether Borges was taking himself very seriously here is not important for the purposes of formal argument. What is important is that he arranges these words and concepts in such a way as to make a determined range of intellectual options available for expression. Whether one believes the critics, who tend to be sceptical about Borges' use of philosophical theories, describing his Berkeleianism in terms of ‘half-serious efforts to make reality more manageable’,¹⁶¹ or even advancing *ad hominem* assertions that the ‘...thinkers who most captivate Borges tend not to be the very best in their respective fields and indeed are often of second rank’,¹⁶² the *formal* aspect of his thought is unaffected, a point Borges makes clear in his rejection of philosophy as a sacred discipline with his admission that: ‘I try to find interpretations and I generally find them by letting the author do the thinking for me’.¹⁶³ In an interpretation of one of Borges' most famous

ficciones 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,' Beatriz Sarlo makes the important point that in this paradise of idealism the human subject can't logically exist as an objective identity, since an identity beyond Tlön's curiously fluid view of reality is inconceivable:

*...the two languages of Tlön have no nouns. One is based on compounded adjectives, the other on compounded verbs. Nouns are in principle impossible, because there is no continuous substance that can provide the empirical and logical basis for a noun.*¹⁶⁴

Because life on Tlön is made up of an endlessly shifting series of events there can be likewise no basis for the *principle* of identity, since identity posits permanent substance. Identity becomes subsumed in a game of regressive paradox, a theme embraced by Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association*, Barthelme's short story 'Paraguay,' as well as the film *Field of Dreams*. On Tlön verbal or adjectival descriptions make objects, not the other way around, but the objects they make are never exactly duplicated since the verbal or adjectival conjunctions by which they were formed are never exactly duplicated.¹⁶⁵ These ideal objects, the disquieting *hrönir*, which can be discovered by simply imagining they're somewhere to be found, exist therefore to subvert the category of human subjectivity. Since there is no reasonable way to disprove the conjecture that the 'I' who exists on Tlön is not equally fictional, neither is there any way to disprove it is not the product of another's mind.¹⁶⁶

While it would be premature to attribute the extended implications of this theory to the Borges of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, one finds the idea in embryo in 'Caminata'.¹⁶⁷ Yet, Borges has not divested himself of the residua of religious imagery: the vision-trick is guaranteed by an implicit appeal to Berkeley's God and the image of the mortal perceiver undercut by the suspicion that there are perceptual forces beyond those of the individual:

*También advierto estrellas vacillantes.
Grandiosa y viva
como el plumaje oscuro de un Ángel
cuyas alas tapan el día,
la noche pierde las mediocres calles.*¹⁶⁸

The poem forms an intriguing coda to Borges' major poetic exploration of the location of the super subjective self in 'Amanecer' where he experiments with the description of a capricious deity revived by «la tremenda conjetura de Schopenhauer y de Berkeley» denying the world its independent physical existence and making it an activity of mind. Of course, this does not mean that Borges is unaware of the paradox of such a position. While both Berkeley and Schopenhauer posit an ego-less subject - the "I" of a God that is locked into an act of self-contemplation sustaining a world - Borges comments that it's precisely because Schopenhauer has been able to write *The World as Will and Representation* that he must realise very well that, to be the subject of contemplation (in this case that of the thinker himself), involves an act of will that is as illusory in his system as any other identity he takes on, including that of its contemner.¹⁶⁹ For Schopenhauer, longing to escape into the nothingness of the Buddhist *nirvana*, the world is pain, and only by releasing the ego from its labour of subjectification can the soul be freed. However, for Borges this broad-souled time, as he shows in 'Caminata' is inescapable. It is the condition underwriting all human existence.¹⁷⁰

2.1.6 An Intrusive Intellectualism

Even though it's in this piece that Borges states his philosophic leanings most explicitly, its intellectual qualities tend to overrun the thematic elements colouring other work in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. While 'Amanecer' is the culmination of a series of insights, its insistent didacticism overwhelms its content, striking one as a rather preachy bit of philosophical conjecture: God holds the world in place by an act of perception that also involves the human subject. What would happen, asks Borges, if during the night in which most people are asleep, the few waking souls (fellow insomniacs, no doubt, like Borges) whose waking consciousness safeguards the world, were to be overwhelmed by a Creator bent on worldly destruction?

*¡Hora en que el sueño pertinaz de la vida
corre peligro de quebranto,
hora en que le sería fácil a Dios
matar del todo Su obra!*¹⁷¹

Nothing happens, however. Thanks to the presence of the insomniacs whose act of perception sustains material existence and the world, human life is protected on its passage into another dawn.¹⁷² Borges' God is a perplexing being, since He appears to rely on human intervention for the perpetuation of the world, a definitely un-Berkeleyan way of looking at things.¹⁷³ Borges possibly sees a reconciliation of apparently contradictory forces in the anonymous God of Berkeley, and the unanimous God of Schopenhauer, a reconciliation of radical subjective idealism with a world that stubbornly remains in existence even without its divine contemplator.¹⁷⁴ For Bishop Berkeley God was the ultimate transcendent Mind in whose omnipresent act of perception the world was preserved, and safely out of the hands of solipsistic sceptics, represented by Hylas in the *Three Dialogues*. Most probably Borges was thinking of Berkeley's theory of special revelation where chunks of existence are made perceptible to human minds by an act of divine dispensation. To explain the apparent contradiction presented by the Creation (a world *already existing* in the mind of an eternal God cannot logically *come into existence* in six frenetic days) Berkeley has Philonous, who represents the idealists, adduce:

*When things are said to begin or end their existence, we do not mean this with regard to God, but His creatures. All objects are eternally known by God, or, which is the same thing, have an eternal existence in His mind; but when things, before imperceptible to creatures, are, by a decree of God, made perceptible to them, then they're said to begin a relative existence with respect to created minds.*¹⁷⁵

By means of such a graduated scale of existent-objects the streets of Buenos Aires, which a few alone insomniacs preserve, enter into this relative existence *alternately* as if blinked on and off by God's perceptual light bulb. This doesn't explain Borges' insistence on the ultimate importance of the few night birds ('trasmochadores') who, «cuando son pocos los que sueñan el mundo» preserve material existence, when only half the world at any time is unilluminated by the sun's rays. Obviously there would always be enough wakeful souls to prevent the world's disappearance at the hands of a testy deity. One way to make sense of the poem's intellectual content is by the introduction of the Gnostic idea of the *demiurge*, a semi-divine spirit responsible for material creation, and, by virtue of such semi-divinity,

an explanation for the existence of evil. The argument runs along the following lines: since there is Evil in the world, but God is Good, God can't have created the world. Therefore something immensely powerful, but intrinsically flawed, might be responsible, and this is the demiurge or artisan. (We need not concern ourselves here with the obvious objection an omnipotent God could have also produced a completely good demiurge.)¹⁷⁶

2.1.7 Borges introduces the "demiurge" as a symbolic mediator

If this were all Borges had in mind we could dismiss the poem as a badly digested piece of philosophical sophistry. However, for Borges the image of the *demiurge* occurs as a staple of his later production, and therefore its genesis should be considered seriously.¹⁷⁷ Borges seems to link Schopenhauer with Berkeley in his 'terrible conjecture' that the world is nothing more than a projection of mind, kept in existence by 'a decree of God'. Schopenhauer, whom Borges continued to read throughout his life, considers the idea in Chapter XXVIII of the Second Book of *The World as Will and Representation*:

*Accordingly (if the world is merely an appearance of God) the world would be a theophany. But let us merely look at it; this world of constantly needy creatures who continue for a time merely by devouring one another, pass their existence in anxiety and want, and often endure terrible afflictions, until they fall at last into the arms of death. He who has this clearly in view will allow that Aristotle is right when he says: (natura daemonia est, non divina).*¹⁷⁸

However, how can Borges make this link between two philosophers so fundamentally opposed in their conclusions as to the ends of human life? The only way Borges can effectively hope to combine Schopenhauer, who preached oblivion as the only means of subduing the will, and Berkeley, who posited acceptance of the world's divine nature as of supreme importance for Humanity's well-being, is in the person of a demiurge, aware of its own imperfection, locked in an agony of indecision between perpetuating or vexatiously destroying the world. This demiurge, however, does not appear in the writing of either thinker, therefore its discovery as an invention serving to link the world with its divinely nodding contemplator, remains a Borgesian compromise. Borges operates the shaky mechanism of his clock-work universe as a philosophical compromise. In the end, the problem must

be resolved with some respect for reality - after all, the world does not simply blink out of existence with the batting of God's eyelashes. A few conscious minds must be involved in perpetuating existence - even if they don't actually know they're doing it. Will a few night owls be enough to keep the city in existence? In the end they are, and Borges, who has been walking the streets, finds his house at daybreak, secure in the knowledge that

*...la noche gastada
se ha quebrado en los ojos de los ciegos.*¹⁷⁹

If 'Amanecer' is intellectually unsatisfactory it can only be because Borges has prematurely attempted to combine dissonant philosophical insights. The cerebralism of the poem also distracts from its strong theme of human isolation, diverted into self-consciously intellectual exercises: «[R]eviví la tremenda conjetura» [that] «trazó el capricho siguiente». The piece also abounds in philosophical assertions: the terrible conjecture of Schopenhauer and Berkeley «declara que el mundo es una actividad de la mente»; «las ideas no son eternas»; the poet is forced to accept the enormity of this reflection, we find it has «doblegó mi razón» underlining the fundamental tension distancing us from emotional content. Borges never amasses such a hefty critical repertoire in the other poems in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* as he does in 'Amanecer': declaration, idea, doctrine, substance and implication, all combine to produce an overwhelmingly cognitive effect alienating us from the poem's romantic atmospherics.

2.1.8 Experiments in Genre

The foregoing argument is not meant to imply aesthetic criticism, but only indicate a formal disjuncture. 'Amanecer' really is a dawning (its meaning in Spanish), but it's the dawning of an intellectual tendency in Borges that was to make his reputation as a writer of short fiction, at home and then in France and later in the United States, and without this exposure to a wider audience it's doubtful the name of Borges would today be anything more than a curiosity of Latin literature.¹⁸⁰ Certainly the nascence of Latin American writing in European and North American critical culture (one can hardly claim it as a *renaissance* since before Borges Latin American writing was largely unknown in the developed North) begins with Borges, even if

the creative mission of contemporary South American writers is one sometimes accomplished with iconoclastic zeal.¹⁸¹ One gets the impression that 'Amanecer' is an experiment in genre rather than a progression from the earlier poems. Although not with specific reference to this piece, Borges was to hint at one of the ontological problems preoccupying him throughout his career. In a Note to 'El Truco' for the 1974 edition of his collected works he says,

*En esta página de dudosa valor asoma por primera vez una idea que me ha inquietado siempre. Su declaración más cabal está en "Sentirse en muerte" (El idioma de los argentinos, 1928) y en la "Nueva refutación del tiempo" (Otras inquisiciones, 1952). Su error, ya denunciada por Parménides y Zenon de Elea, es postular que el tiempo está hecho de instantes individuales, que es dable separar unos de otros así como el espacio de puntos.*¹⁸²

Even if the poem's intellectual content is eccentrically integrated, 'Amanecer' has something to offer from the point of view of an individual formulation of the nature of space. One notices a striking image recurring at other points throughout *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, establishing a formally geometric series of associations serving to structure Borges' meditations on his other dominant theme: Time and intimacy. The poet wanders the night streets, absorbed in his bookish reflections, but suddenly becomes aware of,

*la superstición de esa hora
cuando la luz como una enredadera
va a implicar las paredes de la sombra*¹⁸³

The moment is climactic, since it's only after this revelation Borges can posit a capricious demiurge against which his fellow insomniacs might struggle to save the world. However, the heroism is underlined by a substratum of geometrical effects structuring the experience and linking it formally to other pieces dealing less explicitly with the problem of philosophical perception and geometry. The strongest of these is the metaphor of the net suggested by the lines above: the light, like a creeper («enredadera») is set to implicate the walls with shadow.¹⁸⁴ Enredadera is formed around the core of 'red' meaning net, and derives from the Latin 'rete' from which the gladiatorial 'retiarius' or 'net-caster' took his title. Borges, however, far from

making a simple poetic allusion to the shape of the light on some shadowy walls, creates a field of resonances in these lines conditioned by the image of the net, representing not only entrapment, but also functioning as a geometrical allusion to a grid-like, logical, regularity. The entrapment of the wall is potential rather than actual, since this is the moment before dawn, and this potentiality of enlightenment is analogous to the poet's own struggle with his philosophical problem. Also the root of «implicar» is the Latin “plicare” meaning to “entwine” and “fold”, whence the term became used in Scholastic philosophy to signify two or more simpler propositions entwined in a complex proposition. While it may be coincidental that both «enredadera» and «implicar» are modified by inclusive prefixes, Borges' use of «doblegar» (to subdue) to suggest the vitality of his struggle with the idea that the fate of the world may hang by a thread, reinforces the metaphor of entwining and implication. Synonymous with the folding image of implication, doblugar etymologically mirrors the “doubling-up” action of implication. When therefore Borges writes this conclusion doubled up his reason he establishes a field of allusions resonating with the fabric-like qualities of the net-like «enredadera». What would happen if a net were also doubled-up like his reason, the poet appears to be asking. Wouldn't those two-dimensional points of geometric intersection determining its being be forced into a new three-dimensional set of relationships, and could this not serve as a spatially informed (labyrinthine) metaphor of human awareness?

2.1.9 A Proto-Labyrinth: Entwining and Enfolding

Of course, I'm implying *Fervor de Buenos Aires* can be read as a proto-labyrinth, a symbol that is only used explicitly as a metaphor in the *fictions* of his mature development after 1941 where the image is crystallised in ‘El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan’. The image is inchoate in Borges' work from the earliest years, and seems to emerge as a successive synthesis of philosophical and religious ideas. I'm not suggesting the labyrinth is the single outcome of Borges' intellectual symbolism, but merely that we can understand its development as an imagic composite whose key element is the metaphor of entwining-enfolding.

The entwining-enfolding metaphor finds two other notable instances of employment, once in ‘La Plaza de San Martín’ and again in

'Campos Atardecidos'.¹⁸⁵ In the first the poet encounters the famous Plaza in Buenos Aires in the heat of an afternoon. Borges' journey creates an atmosphere of anticipation and exertion through a series of key geographical and physical images before allowing us to come upon the hushed, enclosed space of the Plaza where,

*[T]odo sentir se aquieta
bajo la absolución de los árboles
- jacarandás, acacias -
cuyas piadosas curvas
atenúan la rigidez de la imposible estatua
y en cuya red se exalta
la gloria de las luces equidistantes
del leve azul y de la tierra rojiza.*¹⁸⁶

The balance of tension between the immobility of the impossibly rigid statue and the yielding curvaceous boughs of the jacarandas and acacias echoes that other tension between the equidistant street lamps (geometrically complex and artificial) and the framing conjunction of sky and earth (natural, yet geometrically simple) and finds its conceptual nexus in the metaphor of the net. The net not only serves to determine a series of spatial relations within the Plaza, it formally orders the concept of the Plaza as a series of relations. Reading the poem one can't conceive of the Plaza in terms other than those Borges has lain down. The moment of apprehension is clearly as intuitively climactic here as in 'Amanecer,' since it is at this point the poet allows the revelation of his relation to overwhelm him. Torn between the exquisite tension of viewing the Plaza from its determined perimeter, and entering, and thereby becoming a human and geometrically indeterminate part of it, Borges utters an anguished *cri de cœur*:

*¡Qué bien se ve la tarde
desde el fácil sosiego de los bancos!*¹⁸⁷

The poet is on the point of entering this sacrosanct space when the awful suspicion comes to him. Just as after entertaining the dreadful thought Buenos Aires might be nothing more than the persisting idea of a few insomniacs, he is shocked by the misgiving that this space

too might hold some power over existence, and looks beyond it to the bustling Port of Buenos Aires filled with the intractable chaos of life:

*Abajo
el puerto anhela latitudes lejanas
y la honda plaza igualadora de almas
se abre como la muerte, como el sueño.*¹⁸⁸

The complex metaphor of the net has been imbued with a sinister atmosphere of anticipation, reminiscent of Borges' growing awareness of the capricious will of a renegade god about to destroy his creation. However, would Borges alone be enough to stave off disaster? Obviously not at this stage, the poet feeling very much under the influence of impersonal philosophical ideas: in a world where time and space are merely the forms human life takes on, one man's efforts to protect the world would obviously count for nothing. As a symbolic foil to the ambitions of a wayward god Borges introduces a sparse religious imagery where environmental effects take on a talismanic power. This power is ambivalent, as befits the character of a universe stretched between the ontological options of impersonality and transcendence and orthodox religiosity. It may be the case that in 'Campos Atardecidos' the hot, dry westerlies sweeping in from the pampas on summer afternoons have 'tyrannised the street like an Archangel' («El poniente de pie como un Arcángel tiranizó el camino») and the night in 'Caminata' is compared to the «el plumaje oscuro de un Ángel» but the imagery shows no sign of further exploration in terms of religious belief. Explicit orthodox religious imagery was not of great concern to Borges at this stage of his poetic development, and it was certainly not of great importance to the *Ultraísta* movement, which took its cues from the technological icons of the twentieth century. Although the Spanish word 'cielo,' which can mean either sky or Paradise, is used ten times in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* it only occurs once in its sacred guise. So too 'God' only makes nine appearances. When compared with the frequency of a key urban image, that of the 'calle,' the contrast is startling: both God and heaven are outnumbered over two to one by the city street, making it by far the most powerful image in Borges' earliest poetry.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 2.2

While there are problems in determining Borges' intellectual project, and we must rely on his own words, we can be sure that he is searching for new ways to present human subjectivity. One of these is to use the metaphor of a card-game to represent the mathematical exigencies of existence. In so doing he combines the human with the logical, a trope that he will use throughout his life to explore the possibility of symbolic determinism. Borges is profoundly impressed by the identification of the author as persistent consciousness, a Berkeleian creator whose consciousness keeps a world alive.

*2.2 Geometrical, Temporal and Deistic Elements of the Labyrinth
Extending Geometricisation: Borges and the Compass*

The wealth of spatial and geometric references in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* is startling. A reading of the poems reveals an abiding concern with the geometrisation of space, both urban and human.¹⁸⁹ While some critics have maintained Borges' persistent use of concrete imagery is a sign of a longing for the reassurance only materiality provides,¹⁹⁰ a closer examination reveals an abiding unease before the geometric physicality of the world that will endure throughout his writing career. Although there are images of physical comfort in much of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, these are usually found in troubled company. While, for example, in the collection's opening poem 'Las calles',¹⁹¹ ('Streets') the poet as *anti-flâneur* deliberately selects the quiet back lanes of the capital for his excursus, «[N] o las ávidas calles, incómodas de turba y de ajeteo...» we find the grid of the city's town planners has become transposed in the imagination of the poet to represent the manifold destinies befalling both he and his fatherland: «hacia el Oeste, el Norte y el Sur se han desplegado - y son también la patria - las calles». This regularity that speaks not so much for the secure life, but of its more unsettling contingencies, is explored in a doubtful eulogy of one of the city's most distinguished open spaces: 'La Plaza de San Martín'.¹⁹² The poet wanders the back alleys alone searching in vain for the light of the late afternoon, stumbling at last into the Plaza where it has been wholly dammed-up, as though it were some liquid substance draining inexorably into its allotted luminescent sump: «la tarde entera se había remansado en la plaza serena y sazónada». However, the poet's quest can't be fulfilled, he can't enter this space, and stands furtively on its outskirts. Even though «[T]odo sentir se aquieta bajo la absolución de los árboles», the poet's eyes are drawn to the rigid marble form of San Martín in the centre of the Plaza, that 'impossible statue' that the 'compassionate curves' of the jacarandas and acacias can only 'attenuate'. The sense of dramatic irresolution is heightened by an ironic exclamation: «¡Qué bien se ve la tarde desde el fácil sosiego de los bancos!». Still, he can't enter. The poet stands paralysed observing «la gloria de las luces equidistantes» until finally his vision falls on the port below as a symbol, beyond the reach of the 'soul-levelling plaza that opens like death or a dream' of 'breathless foreign latitudes' serving as counterpoint to his existential paralysis. Geometry, the geometry of these familiar streets, becomes the topography of existence.

2.2.1 *Dinner with the Minotaur*

How can geometric relations articulate a particular existential unease in Borges that is “revealed” as anything else than a series of allusive associations? In other words, how is one to read Borges’ early poetry in a way consistent with his later works where the concerns outlined here would become explicit? To deny such a move need be made, that Borges was simply writing on the subjects interesting him in the late 1930s and early 1940s, would be a denial that a writer’s work is a continuous process of intellectual development. I admit Borges’ thematic links to his early production are tenuous (one is obliged to particularise certain statements he made at the end of his career to archaeologise his thematic development), but I would also argue we should trust the author’s judgement in cases of autobiographical revelation if for no other reason than it is the author who, in remembering a personal past, provides the best evidence for analysis. The argument from best evidence does not, however, seek an uncritical reading: Borges himself might have disagreed with some of the interpretations that I’ve placed upon his text. He doesn’t, after all, provide a wealth of biographical material from which to theorise the continuities, but rather delights in making his progress as fragmentary as possible. We are obliged, not wishing to stay at the multicoloured surface of his work, to dive below it for explanations.

The question that must be asked of such an enterprise is, By what means and under what conditions will such a submarine journey be permissible? To these questions I would answer that allusion, as a principle of investigation, is sufficient to establish at least a *semantic* link between the particular words an author uses. In other words, it’s the dictionary meanings of the words themselves, independent of intention, rhetorical strategies, or emphatic stress, and other authorial baggage, that gives the basic meaning to the combinations of words making up sentential structures.¹⁹³ It’s important to understand it isn’t *literary* allusion that functions as our paradigm of association between the text and texts that have gone before it (which is the usual level at which Borges is read), but an attempt to understand the internal dynamics of Borges’ intellectual project based on the conclusions gathered by paying attention to the way his words underwrite certain conclusions more strongly than others.¹⁹⁴ Put simply, I trust Borges to tell the truth about himself, at least at this early stage of his career.¹⁹⁵

Having made this point let us now find a genetic source for the use of geometrical allusion in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. One is drawn back to the use made by Borges' father of a chessboard in illustrating the paradoxes of Zeno to his son. Games certainly instilled a predilection for geometric allusion in him. In 'Plaza de San Martín' the sunlight playing through the jacarandas and acacias creates a 'network' recalling the 'equidistant' points of intersection on a chessboard's squares, a figure also working forcefully in the image of the 'spread-out streets' of 'Las calles'.

2.2.2 *Truco: Borges Deals a Mystical Hand*

The motif of an unsettling, and rectangular, geometry is further explored in 'El truco' but temporal suspension also informs geometric reflection.¹⁹⁶ In Borges' description of the game the ritual aspect displaces normal considerations of space and personality, allowing the cards as «pintados talismanes» to represent a world separated from ordinary reality. This is the first time that the game within a game motif appears, and as 'the alternatives of the game repeat and repeat themselves' the players are encapsulated, their lives detained by the table's margins in a series of relationships governed by the cardboard amulets.¹⁹⁷ Is the game an attempt to suspend time, as well as space? As a foreign student in a Genevan school Borges' had broken into the closed ring of student friendships by teaching the other boys to play truco.¹⁹⁸ Borges' could have been using geometrical allusion to establish a sympathetic resonance with the *remanso* motif referred to earlier. When we treat time (and life as the human phenomenon of time) as a quasi-material substance, something we can manipulate either by "damming it up" or allowing it to "detain" the existence of a group of card-players, time also becomes amenable to material manipulation as an object of geometry. Geometry, as the description of spatial relations, is interchangeable with a time thought of in this way. However, such a time/geometry will also be amenable to other ideas populating the Borgesian text, particularly those of a philosophical nature. One can't have an explanation of an intellectual process that disallows the interaction of all members that have been taken up for analysis. Following such a principle of interaction I suggest a continuation of the reading of Borges' early poetry as an environment of thematic synthesis between philosophical and conceptual influences, rather than a monologic plane of discourse.

The suspension of Time plays a strong part in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Heaped up before the young poet into a coffer dam of the future, Time becomes a barely penetrable barrier to human activity. The 'colours that tired themselves out' («se cansaron...») in 'Un Patio',¹⁹⁹ echo «los muebles de caoba » [that] «perpetúan entre la indecisión del brocado su tertulia de siempre» of 'Sala Vacía' in their personalisation.²⁰⁰ In such a fantastic and stifled world the future becomes less a real possibility than a symbolic entity representing an obstacle to be overcome. The perambulating Borges of 'Las calles' and 'La Plaza de San Martín,' becomes, in 'Final de Año' ²⁰¹ transfixed by the thought that «[N]i el pormenor simbólico de reemplazar un tres por un dos ni esa metáfora baldía que convoca un lapso que muere y otro que surge» can trouble the night. No theory of time can adequately account for the future's multiform possibilities. The self-repeating alternatives of 'El Truco' find their ontological expression in Borges' realisation of the infinite opportunities offered by «El enigma de Tiempo». However, whereas the geometry of place seemed to channel the poet almost against his will (coercing him for example into a confrontation with the 'soul-levelling' Plaza de San Martín) the geometry of time provides a metaphor of infinite alternative possibilities. If they have to be confronted, battled-for and overcome, so much the better.

2.2.3 *The Trouble with God in Borges*

However, if time allows the possibility of human autonomy, thereby becoming an antidote to the intractability of geometry, the relationship is a troubled one. 'Amanecer' for example, gives us a picture of the poet as philosophical conjurer, prognosticating a twilit interval where even an insomniac God might destroy his creation. However, this Gnostic vision of a capricious creator is not Berkeley's incomparably benign deity. Whether Borges was influenced by his early reading of Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (by means of which he taught himself to read German prose) a work whose central theme is that one may dream another into existence,²⁰² is difficult to say.²⁰³ The suspension of time as a process of *consciousness* is certainly of interest in the poem, but the melding of Berkeley's benign deity with the unpredictable God of the Gnostics gives Time, treated quasi-personally in the poem, a sinister flavour. Time may allow a manifold of alternatives, but one of them implies the abolition of time, and with it human consciousness.

The thematic location of God is one of the most intriguing mysteries of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. The collection is imbued with a pervasive deistic spirituality. However, the face, or the voice, of Borges' God is hard to find. God for Borges may be the possibly capricious deity of 'Amanecer', but He is also a fugitive presence. The most explicit face of this shame-faced God comes in 'Benarés'²⁰⁴ when Borges composes a city «Falsa y tupida como un jardín calcado en un espejo» to explore the idea of imaginative creation.²⁰⁵ The imaginary city is a phantasm of the real Indian city, crowded with nightmarish conglomerations of temples and altars, prisons and patios, the delirious orientalised of an exotic East where Conrad's Kurtz or Lord Jim could have happily wandered. Yet, Borges is concerned to introduce a monotheistic reading of this «ciudad de los muchos dioses» in the shape of an imam, who troubles the air proclaiming the singularity of God from his high tower («...la voz de un almuédano apesadumbra desde su alta torre el aire de este día y anuncia a la ciudad de los muchos dioses la soledad de Dios»). 'Soledad' here also troubles the reading of the poem since its connotation of 'solitude' or 'loneliness' creates a dichotomy between the originary forces of the poem itself. Borges the poet describes the poetic city, constantly aware his description is a creation, a project that might occupy the attention of a solitary deity. Though Borges, and presumably the unnamed deity whose activity the poet mimics, are both aware of the illusion. For while the solitary God is finding His expression on the lips of an imam, Borges is 'thinking that while [he himself] plays with uncertain images, the city [he] sings remains in a fixed location in the world' («Y pensar que mientras juego con dudosas imágenes, la ciudad que canto, persiste en un lugar predestinado del mundo»). The mimesis of poetic creation by terrestrial creation therefore undercuts the mimesis of God by the poet: both compositions are equally arbitrary and fragile, caught, as it were, in the mirror reflection of the opening line.

Can one really see Borges as the poetic and terrestrial version of Berkeley's God? The image of Borges as the solitary spectator keeping the poetic 'Benarés' alive occurs again in 'Caminata' where the solitary poet, wandering the back streets of Buenos Aires at midnight, expresses the poetic imagination in terms of ontological maintenance: «Yo soy el único espectador de esta calle; si dejara de

verla se moriría». ²⁰⁶ Yet, this is not the God of the philosophers alone, since Borges introduces a biblical element in the shape of a night sky descending like «...el plumaje oscuro de un Ángel cuyas alas tapan el día». Borges revisits religious motifs in 'Calle desconocida' where the wandering poet identifies with the crucified Christ, reflecting that his footsteps reproduce those on Golgotha («...todo inmediato paso nuestro camina sobre Gólgotas»). ²⁰⁷

It's impossible to discover the candour of Borges' religious allusions, the poet being notoriously reticent to reveal anything but the most 'philosophical' aspects of his work. However, it would be incautious to accuse him of insincerity. ²⁰⁸ He has an idea of a God (that much the poems, as well as the later works, affirm) and this God has an intriguing personality. Imbued with Gnostic ambivalence and Berkeleian universal responsibility, the Borgesian God is a study in conflictive character. Possibly destructive (remember 'Amanecer'), He is driven by a sense of duty to maintain a world with which He has grown tired, this tiredness echoed in Borges' frequent use of nocturnal and vesperal images to convey a tranquillity that might be regularly interrupted by the wakeful activity of day. ²⁰⁹

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 2.3

In Luna de enfrente Borges breaks free of his earlier ontological concerns. Seeking a new, less complex understanding of human subjectivity, he also realises a new awareness of his role as author-producer. By personalising his ontological angst through an address to female personae, he is unable to completely divest himself of the old philosophising habit, projecting his former anxieties onto women as unattainable poetic objects. Women become as abstract, as symbolic, as the demiurge through whose intercession the world is maintained. But Borges is making some progress: by renegotiating the city as an object of parodic reportage, he shifts his poetic persona to a more obvious rôle, that of the ironic outsider.

2.3 The ontological and historical fallacies

Luna de Enfrente as Intertext

Borges was to maintain an interest in the supramundane in his next collection, *Luna de enfrente* (1925), but the later poetry demonstrates a transition from the possibilities (and impossibilities!) of idealism to a greater emphasis on historical contingency. One may read *Luna de enfrente* as Borges' return to the world. The earlier thematic repertoire is maintained, but its elements are now used to renegotiate a shifting terrain of existential concern. In this way the second collection of poems functions as an intertext where the metaphysical aporias of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* coalesce into more generalised areas of interest.²¹⁰ This has the effect of lifting Super-Objectivity above the page as if it were a new platform from which Borges surveys *Luna de enfrente* as a work of art waiting to be born. Not only is it a collection of individual pieces, but also a pre-formed genre waiting to be written-into. Borges had been reviewed and commented on in several avant-garde magazines, and he was becoming known in more traditional reviews as well. It is implausible to imagine that Borges, the formerly unknown *Ultraísta*, was unaware of his new status. Borges the poet was writing poetry, and quite self-consciously too.

2.3.1 Intimacy... and Sentimentality.

The love poem, now become the lament of love departed, occupies the same prominence as before. The titles 'Amorosa anticipación' and 'Una despedida' (A Farewell) speak eloquently for their contents. Yet, subjective historical awareness is by far the most emphatic element. Of *Luna de enfrente*'s seventeen poems, half deal with a historical subject. The topic is either real, as a recollection of the Borges' links with Buenos Aires' settlement, or an imaginary projection to an exotic locale. The remainder of the poems deal nostalgically with the barrio, or paint an intimist portrait of family life.²¹¹ The night-owl is still there, but his nocturnal ramblings have been somewhat circumscribed by the domestic scene where Borges' frequent allusions to the historical past act as a counterbalance to the lukewarm stagnancies of family life.

Luna de enfrente also heralds something of a personalisation of the ontological angst of the earlier work. God and Time still figure, but now he incorporates them into an evolving emotional life. The effect is disjunctive, since it's impossible to reconcile the frosty indifference of a supernatural creator with the emotional warmth of sentimental love. In 'Amorosa anticipación' God stands in as a vernal presence, promising a new vision of the target of Borges' affections. Yet, He still retains a menacing ambivalence:

*Arrojado a quietud,
divisaré esa playa última de tu ser
y te veré por vez primera, quizá,
como Dios ha de verte,
desbaratada la ficción del Tiempo,
sin el amor, sin mí.*²¹²

2.3.2 Woman/God as Parallel Abstractions in Borges

This is a curious way for Borges to see his beloved, especially if he has sensed her «sueño implicado en la vigilia de [sus] brazos». ²¹³ In an attempt to elevate this woman to the status of 'virgen' Borges indulges in what might be called an "ontological fallacy". ²¹⁴ To indulge in ironic contrast for a moment, where Dryden taxed Donne with perplexing the minds of the "fair sex" with speculations of philosophy, 'where nature only should reign' ²¹⁵, and what Doctor Johnson called, in his vituperative *Life of Cowley* the metaphysical pretensions that come as a series of 'heterogenous ideas...yoked by violence together', ²¹⁶ Borges transfers woman out of physical reach in the form of a transcendent name. ²¹⁷ Stripped of carnality, she exists *in discordia concordis*, an abstraction to be pondered by the poet-worshipper rather than the poet-man. With woman safely out of reach, Borges indulges in a parallel fantasy of *artistic* abstraction. The poet no longer contemplates a real woman, but an object of philosophical management, removed from the world and existing in the eye of God. Of course, this God is carefully sexless, which automatically makes the woman's new "virginity" sacrosanct. ²¹⁸ She is thus available to operate as a symbol of affective displacement. One can't love a virgin-goddess as a woman, therefore one might love her as the spiritual token of the poet's projected emotionalism. ²¹⁹ Maybe this explains why he put off marrying until he was in his late sixties. When he did fall into the arms of a real woman in 1967, Elsa Astete Millán, an old

childhood friend, he could only endure her for three years. They divorced in 1970.²²⁰

While “woman” is prey to the poet’s mundane sexual nostalgia, God undergoes not so much a diminution in Borges’ emotional universe, as a renovation in *Luna de enfrente*. Liberated from the job of providing the poet with an ontological focus for his existential anxieties, He now functions as a quasi-historical personage, occupying the role of Super-Objective Time in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. In ‘El General Quiroga va en coche al muere’ (General Quiroga Rides to his Death by Coach) God acts as the arbiter of a divine justice that will punish general Juan Manuel:

*Ya muerto, ya de pie, ya inmortal, ya fantasma,
se presentó al infierno que Dios le había marcado*²²¹

This is a conventional God, the Almighty of the Last Judgement. Indeed, judgement occupies the poet’s thoughts to a large extent in *Luna de enfrente*. Both ‘Casi Juicio Final’ (Almost Last Judgement) and ‘Último sol en Villa Ortúzar’ (Last Sun on the Villa Ortúzar) forcefully evoke the idea of a last reckoning. In fact the tone of *Luna de enfrente* is highly self-condemnatory: the poet is locked into a discourse with a god who possesses the magisterial traits of the Old Testament deity. The trend begins with *Fervor de Buenos Aires* that, despite its celebratory tone, creates an environment of radical doubt as to the nature of earthly creation and our relationship with a supernatural being. However, whereas the ambivalence of this earlier demiurge could be thwarted by the night-walking poet, this new God is beyond the reach of human influence. The god who rules this traditional heaven would be unimpressed by Borges’ stratagem of self-conscious observation in ‘Caminata’. We get the feeling it’s a matter of complete indifference if in this case he leaves off looking at the street or not. Borges’ relationship with supernatural agency has become so objectified that when, in ‘Último sol en Villa Ortúzar’ he contemplates the old mansion, and is flooded with a series of memories, his separation from the supernatural is so banal he can no longer tell if what he observes through the iron grating is ‘a tree or a god’.²²² Locked out of that magical place the Villa becomes a symbol of the poet’s separation from an active role in world-maintenance. The poet has become the conventional mortal whose relationship with the

cosmic forces of creation is pre-determined and immutable. In 'Versos de catorce' his role is reciprocal, yet marked by a certain passivity:

*Así voy devolviéndole a Dios unos centavos
del caudal infinito que me pone en las manos*²²³

The poet's place is fixed as the receiver of divine gifts rather than their bestower, a theme he'd reiterate in the 'gift' poems.²²⁴ The poet who could keep a city alive by perceiving it in the idealist fantasy of 'Caminata' is reduced to the established role of the grateful artist whose works arise not from within himself, but as the result of divine inspiration. This is another effect of the ontological fallacy. While the love-object is idealised and de-sexualised, the role of the poet becomes minimised into what might fulfil the task of adoration. The cosmos of the inspired artist obeys a strictly feudal economy. One's greatness *derives* from a greater power, and is therefore a gift. The price for such a gift is the imagined transferral of one's artistic sensibility to that of an extramundane personality. Here the artist shines only by reflected light, and this light emanates from the God granting him a portion of his own greatness. Inspiration is thus a relationship of continual reciprocity: God grants artistic excellence on the instalment plan. However, one day the debt might be paid in full; these pennies from Heaven have a way of mounting up. Art is therefore a deferred payment, which makes it directly available to the symbolism of accumulating debt. Because the ontological economy is so unequal (God's resources are infinite) the only logical recourse of the poet is to an inverted historicity. Because the poet can never hope to pay off the fabulous sums expended in this cosmic stipend, individual personality becomes subsumed by historical awareness. The debt is paid, so long as the Almighty Book-Keeper allows the perpetuation of an individual personality throughout history. The occupation of this personality will be, of course, to glorify God through art. The artist therefore obtains a never-ending contract with God for His inspiration, and God is remunerated by a series of works of art throughout history.

This relationship is grounded in art's historical fallacy: the artist's self-perception as a continuous historical entity. Borges gives us an excellent example of the transition from the ontological to the historical fallacy in 'Mi vida entera' where he imagines himself as a

continuous historical presence engaged in a dialogue with an inspiratorial power. The piece also demonstrates sexual transference and allows one to see how the idealisation of “woman” integrates with the cosmic credit-debt economy. The world-weary poet reflects on a lost love, casting himself as the eternal wanderer-paramour:

*Aquí otra vez, los labios memorables, único y semejante a vosotros.
He persistido en la aproximación de la dicha y en la intimidad
de la pena.*²²⁵

We see that this unnamed woman can be worshipped in a variety of other women. She becomes stripped of individual personality and functions as a collection of symbols, in this case a pair of memorable lips. These aren't, it should be noted, so memorable as to require real thoughts of fidelity in the poet. The lips of this «niña altiva y blanca y de hispánica quietud»²²⁶ are memorable only as symbols, thus they may be safely forgotten in reality.

The poet is next inspired to a catalogue of Herculean labours. He has «atrevesado el mar...conocido muchas tierras» yet at no time has he let his standards slip.²²⁷ The poet's life is charmed by a special discrimination in social relations: only some people are worthy of consideration, those who show personal and artistic distinction: «he visto una mujer y dos o tres hombres».²²⁸ Yet, such a responsibility is unutterably burdensome. The poet is weary of his vocation and despairs of novelty:

*He paladeado numerosas palabras.
Creo profundamente que eso es todo y que ni veré ni ejecutaré
cosas nuevas.*²²⁹

Yet, he can't slough off the immortal task since it has been granted by an Almighty, and potentially All-Punishing, God. The presence of an all-powerful deity acts as a force of regulation constraining Borges' poetic mission to sing the praises of the city, as well as the potential for hubris associated with poetic creation. To fend off the possibility of over-weening pride he offers an expiation of his gifts to placate a jealous creator. In poetry humility is always a safe bet:

Creo que mis jornadas y mis noches se igualan en pobreza y en

*riqueza a las de Dios y a las de todos los hombres.*²³⁰

2.3.3 Transhistorical Subjectivity: City as Renegotiated Space

The three early collections of poems describe a gradual shift from philosophical introspection to historical narrative. The reason for this is probably that Borges, after spending so many years of his adolescence abroad in Europe, longed to re-acquaint himself with the Buenos Aires of his youth. *Fervor de Buenos Aires* had been written in a spirit of nostalgia where Borges' philosophical readings had played a substantial part in the creation of a fantastic city of mystery and intellectual conjecture. The Buenos Aires of *Luna de enfrente* is no less shadowy and seductive, but here the bounds of the city have been extruded into the mythic past of colonisation, the wars of independence and heroism, a trend seeing its ironic development in *Cuaderno San Martín* and its culmination in Borges' mythic pseudo-biography of the poet Evaristo Carriego.²³¹ Buenos Aires becomes not so much a real city, as the landscape of imaginary reflection containing a world in a few avenues and suburbs. As he acknowledges in 'Calle con almacén rosado,'

*...la confesión de mi pobreza:
no he mirado los ríos ni la mar de Buenos Aires
y yo forjo los versos de mi vida y mi muerte con esa luz de calle.
Calle grande y sufrida,
eres la única música de que sabe mi vida.*²³²

For Borges the city of Buenos Aires is becoming immortal and symbolic. One sees how its suffering streets have taken on the poet's existential concerns. Not only is Borges guaranteed a continuous historical existence as the city's sacred minstrel, but the concrete matter of existence has become anthropomorphised to adequately reflect the poet's mission. It also functions as a historical axis where time's objectivity is subsumed by historical contingency. Time, as an entity that might be treated in the vocative, and cajoled and placated, gives way to a more mundane construct, the punctuated time of the historiographer and the journalist. This time is external to the perceiver in the sense it can be objectified as an independently existing phenomenon. The poet is therefore only able to engage with it as an effect of historical externality. It seems contradictory, but in effect Borges stands outside the vocative Super-Objective Time of

personal identification to employ the concept in its historical guise. Historical Time is just as amenable to manipulation by the poet as its Super-Objective counterpart, but only from a point of view removed from existential influence. Historical Time, the time of historical fallacy, may still be cajoled and eulogised, but only by a poet who stands removed from the action, who no longer has a direct involvement in the phenomenon. Historical Time is an objective construct which no longer has the power to influence its observer.

Borges' equivocal use of the word time allows him to make subtle shifts between the subject position always within time, and a quasi-objective standpoint. That's why in 'Amorosa anticipación' 'the fiction of Time' can't spoil the object of Borges' affections, yet in 'Jactancia de quietud' (The Boast of Quietude) while he is sitting quietly at home contemplating life, he can reflect that «el tiempo está vivíendome» as though he was seeing it through the eyes of an extra-temporal third party.²³³ On the other hand, this time is not the inevitable time of 'A Farewell' which «se desbordada sobre el abrazo inútil», a time he shares with his lover and one that frustrates his passion.²³⁴ The poet again slips out of subjectivised time and into its historical counterpart in 'Montevideo' where he describes the Uruguyan capital as a pristine version of a Buenos Aires becoming modernised. However, even here Borges is unable to fully divest himself of time as subjective experience, acknowledging that for all its nostalgic appeal, Montevideo is a «puerta falsa en el tiempo» rather than a way of obtaining genuine historical experience.²³⁵

Perhaps it is Borges' growing realisation that poetic reflection is always doomed to give onto time's false door that changes his sense of domestic nostalgia in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, transforming it into the historical mythopoesis of *Luna de enfrente*. The historical pieces have a certain sentimental grandiosity in their titles: 'Al horizonte de un suburbio,' 'La promisión en alta mar,' 'Dulcia linquimus arva,'²³⁶ but there is little reason to suspect they contain the gentle irony of 'Fundación mítica de Buenos Aires' or 'Elégia de los Portones' in *Cuaderno de San Martín*, works to which he attached no particular artistic value. Borges is not so much aiming at an extension of trans-historical subjectivity as a consolidation of the historical element. That such poems fail to do anything more than elicit a certain passion for national pride is a demonstration of their mediocrity, a quality absent

in earlier poems like 'Benarés' and 'Rosas' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, where the poet's relation to history is treated in an intuitive way, as if the poet and the poem were participating in a cosmic mystery.

2.3.4 *Contingent Narrative versus Narrative Contingencies*

If the historical fallacy on the whole makes for bad poetry (one need only invoke the name of Kipling for confirmation),²³⁷ it does contribute to an understanding of the poet's vocation as narrative craft.²³⁸

Historical poetry is versified historical narrative, and as such it must obey the regulations of narrative. Everything is contingent in such a form: the poet is recounting a tale, not creating a work of art, therefore the intriguingly superfluous is to be done away with, or else given an aesthetic treatment suitably beautifying it for consumption. The opposing constraints of arranging a series of incidents, but ensuring their elements are attractive, gives narrative verse its cosmetic quality. In 'El General Quiroga va en coche al muere' a work owing its inspiration to Borges' reading of *Martín Fierro* as much as to a desire to make Argentine history ontologically attractive,²³⁹ the banalities of the countryside are metaphorised into a web of symbolic occurrence: the coach in which the doomed gaucho general rides becomes «un galerón enfático, enorme, funerario» drawn by «cuatro tapaos con pinta de muerte en la negrura». In such a prophetic vehicle the general consoles himself with an existential certainty. Safe in his coach he is «afianzado y metido en la vida como la estaca pampa bien metida en la pampa».²⁴⁰ Although one can't deny the rhythmic attractiveness of the piece, where the jolting of the carriage is clearly suggested by the elasticities of the metre, it places the poet outside the work of art as its technician rather than its participant. In fact this is the only poem so explicitly shouting the name of poetry at its audience. Only the milongas, a verse form composed especially for musical accompaniment, and one Borges would use for *Para las seis cuerdas* (For Six Strings) in 1965 are more categorical in their poetry.²⁴¹

Borges was to continue to explore historical narrative verse in *Cuaderno San Martín*. The last volume of verse he'd publish before *El hacedor* of 1960, the title is an ironic and self-deprecating reference to the brand-name of the cheap notebook where he composed it, rather than to the Argentine national hero. Borges may have also selected the title in allusion to the more naturalistic style of this volume and its

persistently historiographic tone. Of the nine pieces inhabiting its covers, only three are beyond the bounds of reportage: 'Curso de los recuerdos,' 'El paseo de julio,' and 'Barrio norte' recapturing the freshness of 'Llaneza' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Borges was fully aware of the divergence between these two forms. In a Prologue to the 1969 edition of his collected works he'd clearly identify these disparate tendencies, but claim they could be resolved in an effective synthesis:

*He hablado mucho, he hablado demasiado, sobre la poesía como brusco don del Espíritu, sobre el pensamiento como una actividad de la mente; he visto en Verlaine el ejemplo de puro poeta lírico; en Emerson, de poeta intelectual. Creo ahora que en todos los poetas que merecen ser releídos ambos elementos existen.*²⁴²

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 2.4

Borges reconciles his self-awareness as poet-producer with that of his self-imposed mission to elaborate the metaphysical obligations that have beset him since childhood. Through his study of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus Borges reconceptualises God as an ambivalent natural principle, unassailed by personal responsibility. Such a God removed from the human sphere will be easier to handle in subsequent works and, indeed, will cease to be the bugbear that has preoccupied Borges so far.

2.4 Mythopoesis

Reconciliations

Borges' realisation that an effective synthesis can be made of 'lyric' and 'intellectual' narrative finds its first expression in a short, and highly peripatetic, 'biography' of a local lunfardo poet published in 1930. Facilitated by the winnings from the Second Municipal Prize for Literature on his third book of essays, *El idioma de los argentinos* (1928), he settled down to compose a continuous prose piece on a subject close to his heart, the poet of Buenos Aires' old southside, Evaristo Carriego. As a child Borges had been sequestered behind the ornamentality of middle-class life. Palermo, the Palermo of the street tough and prostitute, had exercised an early fascination expressing itself in his accounts of the more colourful aspects of old Buenos Aires. *Hombre de la esquina rosada* was originally sketched out as *Hombres pelearon* in *El idioma de los argentinos*, and is loosely based on his conversations with the retired gangster Nicolas Paredes whom Borges had met during his early days with the *Proa* circle. In a prologue to *Evaristo Carriego* Borges illustrates the attractiveness of gangster-life with a dichotomy between the world of books and the world of reality. Real life, the life of the street, happens tantalisingly beyond his reach:

*Yo creí, durante años, haberme criado en un suburbio de Buenos Aires, un suburbio de calles aventuradas y de ocasos visibles. Lo cierto es que me crié en un jardín, detrás de una verja con lanzas, y en una biblioteca de ilimitados libros ingleses...¿Qué había, mientras tanto, del otro lado de la verja con lanzas? ¿Qué destinos vernáculos y violentos fueron cumpliéndose a unos pasos de mí, en el turbio almacén o en azaroso baldío?*²⁴³

2.4.1 Re-voicing Narrative Poetics: Dialogues with God through German Idealism

However, even if the gangster life of Buenos Aires fascinated him, the vehicle through which he sought to express it was soon channelled along another line of inquiry: a theory of narrative poetics taking the production of myth as its underlying plank. Although he admired Carriego, who had been a family friend from Borges' childhood, and his work immensely, his slim single volume of poetry couldn't furnish

him with enough material for a book, even a comparatively short one. He had set out to write a straight biography of the *lunfardo* poet, '[B]ut when I began writing my book the same thing happened to me that happened to Carlyle as he wrote his *Frederick the Great*. The more I wrote, the less I cared about my hero.'²⁴⁴ The reference to Carlyle is significant. Borges had acquired a taste for German by reading *Sartor Resartus* while the family was in Geneva in 1914. The work is a satire on academic idealism, written in English, but containing a lively peppering of German philosophical language. Charmed by its scatological asides (the hero's name is Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, which translates as *Diogenes Devil'sdung*) Borges was to transmit its quirky construction to his biography of Carriego. However, what part has Thomas Carlyle's account of the mythical Professor Teufelsdröckh to play in Borges' early narrative? Carlyle's philosophical point of view provides some answers.

Carlyle was committed to satirise what his Scots intellectual frugality took to be a German predilection for abstruse and compounded learning. To this end he composed a miscellany of philosophical opinions then current and attempted to ridicule their foundations and exposition. As various versions of idealism had by the 1830s begun to make their presence felt on the Continent, largely through the influence of the further systematisation of Kant (1724-1804) via Fichte and Schelling, the contrafluvial influence of British empiricism had already been operating in Britain through the teachings of Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Whether this stream, which took the reception of sensation as its epistemological strategy instead of the ordering of concepts by pre-existing faculties (idealism) was an attempt to explore one branch of Cartesian dualism at the expense of the other, is beside the point.²⁴⁵ What matters is Carlyle's working out of a series of interconnected ontological problems throwing light on elements of Borges' own philosophical development.

Sartor Resartus is not merely a rebuttal of German idealism but an elaboration of Carlyle's own theories of intellectual progress. These embody certain ontological difficulties. Carlyle was influenced by the idea of Romantic sensibility, which originates in the mind and is enriched through the contemplation of Nature. One can see an immediate source of epistemological conflict: sensibility is an

indeterminate affectivity, or feeling, which must rely on a process of sensory induction, or sense experience. Thus, the Romantic is empirically grounded. However, the interpretation of this experience only takes place thanks to certain mental faculties, or indwelling principles of experiential organisation (categories). Thus, Romantic sensibility is, in the philosophical sense, ideally determined. Because determinism is philosophically repugnant to the Romantics' sense of passionate individuality, they find themselves in a dire conflict of rational accommodation. Carlyle's criticisms of Kant are an attempt to resolve this conflict through the Romantic's epistemological ace in the hole, the appeal to a higher authority, in this case God.²⁴⁶ However, does such an appeal only compound the problem of determination, which in the presence of supremely powerful supernatural entities, is usually referred to as predestination? It would if Carlyle and the Romantics were thinking of a personified deity with anthropomorphic habits. However, the existence of such an extraphysicality would cause obvious trouble with the *idealistic* tenor of the aestheticism the Romantic movement takes for granted. Beauty, and ugliness for that matter, is squarely in the eye of the beholder, a position taking the intersubjectivity of the world as fundamental. The solution is a compromise, though not a good one: let God be Nature, and therefore impersonal, enduring, and not least importantly, even slightly indifferent. Man's view of the world is fashioned by unmediated communication with its essential nature, which is *ipso facto* part of his own nature. Such a God requires very little more of its worshippers than sublime adoration.²⁴⁷ This is the God of Carlyle, Wordsworth, Goethe, Kant and Rousseau.²⁴⁸ It's also the God of Borges.

This is also a rarefied version of the God of the Gnostics. Now devoid of human traits, but no less indifferent to human dilemmas, the romantic God can't be placated, but only endured. This is the God Borges ultimately contemplates in 'Caminata' and which requires his vigilance to secure the sleeping streets in his own perception of them as their «único espectador».²⁴⁹

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 3.1

Borges' linguistic investigations signal a growing interest in words as the carriers of enduring historical signification. Through his study of Argentine national literature, he comes to the conclusion that it embodies the cultural values of its participants. Words, the basic stuff of literature, assume a quasi-independence as mental entities, i. e. as functional cognitive operations. Because these entities are culturally embodied, any new works produced will likewise transfer these values. One need only read a nation's literature to gain the functional apparatus that allows its values to be transmitted - personal ontology might be an effect of the accumulation of these cognitive effects. Words therefore may be seen as codifications of cognitive processes, an insight that will be crucial for the construction of symbolic objects in narrative. There is no need to assume, however, that these functional cognitions are psychologically complex; the accumulation of basic functional relations may be enough to explain apparently elaborate psychic activity. Borges applies his theory to Don Quijote, establishing a functional understanding of the Knight's fictive environment. Borges' misrecalled metaphors confirm his theory, lending words a life of their own.

CHAPTER THREE

Verbal Relations and Everyday Life: A Regimen of Signification

Grammatica Dei Grammatica Populi

Although Borges had been working towards a theory of poetic language as an Ultraist, it is only with the publication of his first collection of essays, *Inquisiciones*, published in 1925, that he seriously begins his investigation of metaphor with reference to linguistics. This collection, like all collections, is a little haphazard, emerging from a series of articles he had written for the various periodicals with which he was associated after the publication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. The reason he looked on this work with such disdain, destroying as many of the five hundred original copies he could get into his hands on its publication, neglecting to mention it in interviews, and refusing to allow it to be published in the first, and all subsequent, collections of his works, is obscure.²⁵⁰ Although the lines of development are a little uneven, *Inquisiciones* contains some of his finest writing, and is certainly no less coherent in tone or content than his two other collections of essays and reviews from the 1920s, *Tamaño de mi esperanza* (1926), and *El idioma de los argentinos* (1928).

In *Inquisiciones* Borges is still concerned with the idea of God and the tenuous position of human subjectivity, but his approach becomes rather more pragmatic. He realises how language operates to fashion existence not so much through philosophical means, but through quite arbitrary linguistic circumstances. We have seen how his ideas shifted from *Fervor de Buenos Aires* through *Luna de enfrente* and *Cuaderno San Martín*, gradually becoming less dependent on an abstract philosophical idealist concept of a quasi-personal relationship with God and shifting towards a greater emphasis on language-use as a conceptual resource. In *Inquisiciones*, and the works that follow it until the late 1930s, where the idea of metaphysical dialogue reasserts itself, Borges focuses less on an idealised human subjectivity (man involved in an a rather one-sided dialogue with the eternal) than on how we produce meaning through the manipulation of language's

symbolic resources. The human subject is still a *product* of linguistic relations, but at the same time is also the producer of linguistic artefacts like poetry and the novel. Human subjectivity is conceived of in terms of an endless re-arrangement of signs. In Borges' own words, «[E]l idioma es un ordenamiento eficaz de esa enigmática abundancia del mundo».²⁵¹

However, won't this just mean that people become the users of a language that allows them an illusory impression of reality? The world contains an abundance of earthly effects, but won't we just be a benighted population of cloak-room attendants in the semantic hotel endlessly arranging them, and rearranging them, to suit our own picayune idea of order? To avoid the closure of such a system Borges proposes a mystic solution: language might strive to construct an autonomous literature living beyond the bounds of ordinary narrative. Such literature becomes an analogue for the demiurge of Gnostic philosophy serving as both creator of the semiotically mundane and as intermediary between human beings and God.²⁵²

3.1 A Functionalist Theory of Verbal Relations

In a series of essays published in *Proa* and *Crítica*, after the publication of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* and *Luna de enfrente*, Borges was to formulate his thoughts on the ontological links between language and human subjectivity in *Inquisiciones* and *El tamaño de mi esperanza*.²⁵³ The title of *El tamaño de mi esperanza* translates as 'My Expectation's Scope',²⁵⁴ and sets out a more programmatic agenda for Borges' thoughts on the part language can play in personal and national identity. Proceeding from insights earlier sketched in *Inquisiciones* he develops a critique of national identity based on the use of language in the epic and the effects of national idiom on the lexic resources of culture.²⁵⁵ This critique is informed by an emphasis on grammar as the syntactic strategy of understanding. In 'El idioma infinito' he attacks two tendencies he feels lie at the heart of literary mediocrity:

*Dos conductas de idioma (ambas igualmente tilingas e inhábiles) se dan en esta tierra: una, la de los haraganes galicistas que a la rutina castellana quieren anteponer otra rutina y que solicitan para ello una libertad que apenas ejercen; otra, la de los casticistas, que creen en la Academia como quien cree en la Santa Federación y a cuyo juicio ya es perfecto el language.*²⁵⁶

Borges sees these twin forces of linguistic usurpation and resistance at work in the formation of the Argentine national character. Caught between the culture of vigorous frontier colonisation (arrabaleros, criollos, lunfardistas) and an equally trenchant reaction from an aristocracy and middle-class forced to take sides in the Wars of Independence of the 19th century, considerations of the legitimacy of linguistic provenance assume an importance it's difficult for the outsider to appreciate.²⁵⁷ Often, as Borges points out, the apparently trivial difference between *ocuparse con algo* and *ocuparse de algo* ('to look after someone') is the subject of intense debate and the source of antagonism in linguistics.²⁵⁸ Borges proposes a novel solution based on a number of strategies, including a uniform approach to etymological derivations, the separability and unrestricted use of prepositions as in German, the inter-changeability of transitive verbs for intransitives, and the use of etymological rigour in the employment of substantives. Nouns are to be the kings of this new linguistic jungle, roaming their domains unencumbered by the need to address themselves to syntactic trivialities²⁵⁹

Despite the ironic tone of the piece (Borges bolsters his case with citations to a panoply of celebrated authors including Flaubert, Rubén Darío, Quevedo, Keats, and Góngora), his intention here can²⁶⁰ be seen as the construction of a preliminary position for his theory of language, and especially for the position that our interaction with the world is essentially grammatical:

*Un puñadito de gramatiquerías claro está que no basta para engendrar vocablos que alcancen vida de inmortalidad en las mentes. Lo que persigo es despertarle a cada escritor la conciencia de que el idioma apenas si está bosquejado y de que es gloria y deber suyo (nuestro y de todos) el multiplicarlo y variarlo. Toda conciente generación literaria lo ha comprendido así.*²⁶¹

3.1.1 *Argentines and the Voice of God*

It's clear Borges is aiming at the construction of a linguistic strategy that will assume a life of its own. However, the 'words that will spring to immortal life in people's minds' here might be taken in an extremely essential form. Such words aren't merely the sensible sounds and marks we make, but the genetic embodiment of a mystic aesthetic and linguistic recombinant principle. This principle is that words exist as quasi-independent mental entities. Their interaction with the mind is conceptual, and as such the theory constitutes a form of verbal idealism.²⁶² Borges extends his ideas in this direction with a critique of the adjective. The adjective, since it serves to colour a noun (and it is the noun that he takes to be the primal unit of linguistic conceptualisation) can be described in terms of its analysis as a primitive noun, or pronoun. Discussing the role of epithet in descriptions of gods and heroes in Homer, he conjectures that adjectives began their lives as object words, but then devolved to a secondary use as the connection between themselves and their original objects was forgotten. They may be adjectives nowadays, but they began life as proto-adjectives, nouns that have slid off the mark and become slightly estranged from their original senses. As such their function as epithets conceals a secret history:

*Prefiero sospechar que los epítetos de ese anteayer eran lo que todavía son las preposiciones: impersonales e insignificativas partículas que la costumbre pone en ciertas palabras y sobre las que no es dable ejercer originalidad.*²⁶³

Adjectives then are parasitic on an object language. They ride within language with the cocky self-assurance of fare-evaders waiting for the conductor to pass them by. Yet, their very presence incites a hazy suspicion - are they fully paid-up passengers on the syntactic bus, or are they hiding the guilty secret of their semantically parasitic natures? Examining a number of examples from literature Borges demonstrates that what they're actually doing is drawing our attention to a quality which is already inherent in the noun they modify:

*Cualquier adjetivo, aunque sea pleonástico o mentiroso, ejerce una facultad: la de obligar a la atención del lector a detenerse en el sustantivo a que se refiere, virtud que se acuerda bien con las descripciones, no con las narraciones.*²⁶⁴

Obviously such a project for substantive purification would be effective only in the case of certain selected instances in line with the aims of the Ultraístas. Narrative would be uninteresting without adjectives. As Borges concedes, «[E]liminarlos puede fortalecer una frase, rebuscar alguno es honrarla, rebuscar muchos es acreditarla de absurda».²⁶⁵

Borges continues his programme to locate the noun as the marker of a conceptual primitive in 'Ejercicio de análisis'. Taking his cue from St. Augustine's famous disavowal of the conscious apprehension of basic ideas, he maintains a strict linguistic positivism:

*Nuestra insapiencia, sin embargo, es sólo verbal y podemos arrimarnos a lo que famosamente declaró San Agustín acerca del tiempo: ¿Qué es el tiempo? Si nadie me lo pregunta, lo sé; si tengo que decírselo a alguien, lo ignoro.*²⁶⁶

Because the problem of description is only *verbal*, the description of concepts in the imagination, especially those with which poetry confronts us, might be ultimately resolvable in logical language: «Creo en la entendibilidad final de todas las cosas y en la de la poesía, por consiguiente»²⁶⁷ To present a case for the logic of poetic diction, Borges analyses a couplet in the thirty-fourth chapter of the *Quijote*:

*En el silencio de la noche, cuando
Ocupa el dulce sueño a los mortales...*²⁶⁸

Dividing the lines into their verbal constituents Borges develops an analysis having much in common with Russell's logical atomism. The locative phrase "En el" can be seen as a mere ante-chamber (zaguán) to the first noun.²⁶⁹ Borges suspects the Latin prototype (in) originally only referred to ubiquitous space, and then passed into a temporal sense.²⁷⁰ It's an «artículo determinado, es promesa, indicio y pregusto de un nombre sustantivo». As such, it prepares us for the name coming to fulfil its promise as a positive conceptualisation. However, such a conceptualisation can only be thwarted by the 'silencio' that cheats our expectation.²⁷¹ This silence is a radical disjuncture, a space for reflection, operating to delay the «heterogéneo contacto» between words that would, a decade later in

guarantee the effectiveness of the oblique Norse metaphors of Snorri Sturluson in 'Las kenningar.'²⁷²

3.1.2 The Quasi-Autonomous Character of Language

In the structure that Borges is creating, language is a quasi-autonomous element. The lexia are abundant, calling themselves Lunfardo, Arrabalero, or Castilian, but it's only through the poet's selection of words that underwrites the promise of poetry. Borges analyses a certain phrase in a couplet in *Don Quijote*, but the *resources* of the work as the totality of associations that gives it meaning, are still secure. The art work remains as an encryption of poetic potential, a genetic house of meaning awaiting the reader's key.²⁷³ As such it's invulnerable to criticism or improvement, even by Borges himself:

*Pienso que no hay creación alguna en los dos versos de Cervantes que he desarmado. Su poesía, si la tienen, no es obra de él; es obra del language.*²⁷⁴

Thus, the expressive power of language is somehow seen as inside language itself, waiting to be recognised in the mind of the audience. Does this place some of the audience at a conceptual disadvantage? It may mean that only certain people, people who have somehow been trained to "see" the poetry in language, will be able to reap the harvest. This seems to be the implication of the 1921 Ultraísta manifesto that promises to correct their 'grave error in aesthetics' and elevates the prestige of literature beyond the reach of the intellectuals and the academy.²⁷⁵ However, such an aesthetic would exclude the criollos and the pedants alike, as we have seen from Borges' condemnation of these 'idle yokels' and 'linguistic purists' in 'El idioma infinito'.²⁷⁶ The sentiment repeats in 'Invectiva contra el arrabalero,' where Borges attacks all pretension in language, whether it be the unwarranted sophistication of the *homme de lettres*, the glorification of urban slang, or the inflexible rustication of the pampa:

*El lunfardo es una jerga artificiosa de los ladrones; el arrabalero es la simulación de esa jerga, es la coquetería del compadrón que quiere hacerse el forajido y el malo, y cuyas malhechoras hazañas caben en un bochinche de almacén, favorecido por el alcohol y el compañerismo.*²⁷⁷

In rejecting criollismo Borges proposes an alternative based on the cultivation of those works that he feels embodies a universal character. *Martín Fierro* of Hernández, of course, is the obvious candidate, and he even recommends the poem be studied by the *porteños* as their only hope of artistic salvation. His reasons for such a panegyric are, however, unclear, but they appear to rest on the belief that language is somewhat contagious. Borges evinces a disparaging prejudice against the importation of Germanic loan-words and their filtration into urban jargon, and thence their gradual diffusion to the unguarded borders of linguistic acceptability. This diffusional process is supposed to account for the reluctance of the criollos themselves to reinvigorate their existing poetic resources. Content with the imports, the criollos become dependent on their steady fix. Although his theory is obscure, it's clear Borges is aiming at a 'universality' in the art work not revealed by paying attention to the words themselves, but rather to their inchoate symbolic resources.²⁷⁸ The main aim of Borges' early critical production, (i.e. before his long excursion into narrative) is to create a conceptual strategy for a plausible aesthetic programme.²⁷⁹

3.1.3 *The Development of a Personal Ontology Through Literature*

We can already see the beginnings of such a strategy in the final essay of *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 'Profesión de fe literaria'. Literature is seen as an intrinsically subjective exercise, an expression of personal ontology:

*Este es mi postulado: Toda literatura es autobiográfica, finalmente. Todo es poético en cuanto nos confiesa un destino, en cuanto nos da una vislumbre de él. En la poesía lírica, este destino suele mantenerse inmóvil, alerta, pero bosquejado siempre por símbolos que se avienen con su idiosincrasia y que nos permiten rastrearlo.*²⁸⁰

Borges' emphasis on the autobiographical aspect of literature is not surprising when we consider his comments on the nature of biography in *Evaristo Carriego*: «Que un individuo quiera despertar en otro individuo recuerdos que no pertenecieron más que un tercero, es una paradoja evidente».²⁸¹ That we should be able to 'awaken' memories belonging to another through the practice of biography implies these memories are somehow encoded in language, because language is

their only means of transmission from one party to another. 'Memories' so-called would therefore seem to be the expression, and transmission, of symbolic experience (the symbols corresponding with the 'idiosyncrasy' of lyric poetry) through the medium of language. This symbolic experience is expressed through the lexic resources of the poet. Its status as 'autobiography' consists not, therefore, in the creation of an individual language, but the expression of individual experiences *through* language in a unique way. The task of the poet is not to remake language alone, but to remake the world and language by means of their interaction. In this the poet is aided by a powerful strategy of synthesis:

*Cualquier metáfora, por maravilladora que sea, es una experiencia posible y la dificultad no está en su invención (cosa llanísima, pues basta ser barajador de palabras prestigiosa para obtenerla), sino en causalizarla de manera que logre alucinar al que lee.*²⁸²

In this paragraph, which takes its inspiration from the psychologist Gustave Spiller's dictum on the unoriginality of Shakespeare,²⁸³ metaphor is privileged as the main strategy for bridging the gap between language and the world. Even the radical defamiliarisation it implies is a way of putting one in touch with words as the keys with which to enter from the world of daily experience into its symbolic counterpart.

3.1.4 *The Secret Life of Words*

Borges was to develop these themes in *El idioma de los argentinos* in 1928. In one of the essays, 'Indagación de la palabra' he establishes the ground work for a theory of verbal relations he'd been moving towards from his earlier *Ultraísta* manifesto. He'd sought to give words a life of their own by the recognition of the relations through which they co-exist:

*Cualquier acontecimiento, cualquier percepción, cualquier idea, nos expresa con igual virtud; vale decir, puede añadirse a nosotros...Superando esa inútil terquedad en fijar verbalmente un yo vagabundo que se transforma en cada instante, el Ultraísmo tiende a la meta primicial de toda poesía, esto es, a la transmutación de la realidad palpable del mundo en realidad interior y emocional.*²⁸⁴

We, as human subjects, are subordinated to the ideas that express *us*, not the reverse. At the same time ideas are to be reduced to their 'primordial elements,' the metaphors composing them.²⁸⁵ Borges saw language at its heart as an essentially metaphoric relation between words. Words signify things in the world, but they bear no physical resemblance to the things themselves: the marks on a page spelling out the word 'cat' are in no way similar to the furry feline-like presences they connote. Words 'mean' things by allowing us to form complementary associations between the things signified. Words always complete other words, hence the relationship between the human subject and the words that can, for Borges, 'add' themselves to us. The implication is that human imagination is primarily founded on grammatical relations having no other subject than their own interaction. The vagabond I, the *ego* of the Freudians, evaporates in such a scenario:

*El sujeto es casi [sic] gramatical y así lo anuncio para aviso de aquellos lectores que han censurado (con intención de amistad) mis gramatiquerías y que solicitan de mí una obra humana.*²⁸⁶

Whose censures Borges feels the need to defend himself against are unknown, but he's probably dusting-off the gloves against the egomarchs of early twentieth-century literature. What really matters is his opinion that people aren't people *first* and word-using organisms second, but that their very being is determined by grammatical relations. Such an idea is hardly new to either sociology or psychology. What comes as a surprise is the emphasis Borges places on the word over other social relations. Words are at a premium, they don't just facilitate social relations, they exist as the formal encodification of what it means to be truly human and civilised. In pretended defense of his ideas Borges answers invisible critics championing a subject whose material existence or spiritual ambition determines their subjectivity by rejoining:

*Yo podría contestar que lo más humano (esto es, lo menos mineral, vegetal, animal y aun angelical) es precisamente la gramática...*²⁸⁷

3.1.5 Verbal Relations as Weakly Psychological

On the basis of this idea Borges sets out to give an explanation of the verbal relations determining a grammar of human meaning. This

explanation is mainly found in the 1928 essay 'Indagación de la palabra,' although it is sketched intermittently in *Inquisiciones*, and we'll now concentrate on the essay as a means of extracting Borges' ideas on conceptual manipulation through language.²⁸⁸ However, in deference to his criticisms of egoist psychology, it is necessary to point out to what extent Borges uses general psychologistic assumptions to bolster his case for a verbally constituted human subjectivity. All Borges' comments are, as anyone can see "psychological," but they are only so in the *weak* sense in that they posit psychological states in their commonsense understanding as propositional attitudes. These attitudes are the ground for meaning attribution. Words *express* states of anticipation, whether these be for a place that can be named, or by prepositions or articles conditioning us to expect a relational state of affairs. This is not, however, a Freudian theory for an *individual's* psychology as an ego-function, nor is it a proto-Lacanian revision of psychological relations based on a secret semiotic economy of association and excess.²⁸⁹ When Borges asks himself, «¿[M]ediante qué proceso psicológico entendemos una oración?»²⁹⁰ his psychology is purely of the intentional kind.²⁹¹ It is intention, understood in its most banal sense as what one *intends* when one speaks, that appears to determine Borges' psychology.²⁹²

Borges begins his investigation with a theory of the basic ideas certain classes of words convey. Such a theory is *grammatical* in the strict sense, and develops an idea he'd previously sketched in 'Ejercicio de análisis'.²⁹³ However, this time, instead of relying on an etymological rationale, he selects a folk-psychological explanation. For the purpose of his analysis only prepositions, articles, nouns and verbs are dealt with. By emphasising the *function* of these words, instead of concentrating on their connotative value, he is able to make useful observations (via critiques of Croce and the Argentine philosopher Manuel de Montolío) on the way in which the atomicity of words may be challenged. Through a critique of the uniqueness of words, he arrives at a position relying on effects of mental association rather than semantic individuality to construct meaning. Such a theory would obviously be valuable for his later work on magic causality, since it reduces the importance of psychological effect in language and emphasises an associative regimen.²⁹⁴

To begin his discussion Borges selects part of one of the most illustrious sentences in Spanish literature, Cervantes': *En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme...* Borges first deals with the preposition 'En' (In) which he points out is not a word on its own, but the *promise* of those which will follow «promesa de otras que seguirán».²⁹⁵ One can see how the 'intentionality' of his grammatical approach is built-in right from the beginning: words function in terms of human ethics, they *promise*, and indeed the whole analysis is peppered with morality terms.

Of the indefinite article 'un' he says that, although it ordinarily expresses the unity of the term that follows it, in this particular case it signifies only that something exists, in this case the noun 'lugar' meaning a place. One sees a problem here with the atomic view that Borges will later exploit. If 'un' usually expresses a unity (a cat, a table, etc.) then how can it come to also mean simply *any of a number* of places, one of which has been taken up for discussion in this particular instance? 'Lugar' presents a problem too, since it derives its relation to 'un' through the preposition 'en', but has no individual value of its own outside being located by the preposition that *promises* it an existence as a real place. Borges comes to the interesting conclusion that the noun 'lugar', which seems to have a cogent semantic value in ordinary speech, here serves only a *syntactic* office:

*Representarse en y representarse en un lugar es indiferente, puesto que cualquier en está en un lugar y lo implica.*²⁹⁶

In Borges' view prepositions in conjunction with nouns make redundant couples, since mentioning one implies the other. Indeed, Borges argues that living is a matter of sorting out the world through the linguistic abstraction called language.²⁹⁷ The same follows logically for the indefinite article 'un' (and presumably for the definite article as well) since their only function is to posit the existence of an object. (One gets a hint here of the future adjectival languages of Tlön.) The basis of his argument is analytic, that is, founded on the principle that the redundant term in a sentence can be eliminated without causing loss of meaning. As such it is a variant of the substitutional argument employed in the previous chapter. However, the syntactic implications for this view on the possessive preposition 'de' (of) aren't favourable, since he concludes it's synonymous with

'en' and merely serves to locate an object in a relationship with other objects.²⁹⁸ It adds nothing to the word it precedes, save to identify it as an object, thus its function is redundant. He uses the same line of reasoning for the definite article 'la', quoting its etymological heritage from the Latin demonstrative pronoun *illa* meaning 'that one'.²⁹⁹ Under his hand language shrinks into the reductionist's paradise of minimal grammatical effects.

So far Borges is interested in dieting the apparatus of language to its anorexic skeleton - indeed language as such is disappearing as we read, subsumed by a rational principle of functional reductionism. But how will the things that literature is *about* - people, places and events - fare? Borges follows the momentum of this line of attack to reduce the place-name 'Mancha' to its functionality as an imaginary locale where the action of the novel takes place. Since the region's topography can be supplied by any other location, La Mancha is biographically superfluous. It adds nothing to the notion of Don Quijote that couldn't have been added by any other district:

*...su realidad no era visual, era sentimental, era realidad de provincianería chata, irreparable, insalvable. No precisaban visualizarla para entenderla; decir la Mancha era como decirnos Pigüé.*³⁰⁰

3.1.6 Ideal Geography: Precursor to Tlön?

As far as it goes this is a good argument. Don Quijote needs a minimum of geography for his adventures: some plains to battle giants in, a few glens in which to encounter love-sick pastoralists, mountains bristling with brigands. La Mancha is a place of the mind that may be safely side-stepped by the political geographer.³⁰¹ So too the particular place from which Don Quijote strikes out for mishap, a point of much debate in Spanish literary scholarship.³⁰² The phrase *En un lugar de la Mancha* can be reduced not simply to the placeholder *La Mancha*, but to any of its components, or even done away with altogether. By the same reasoning *de cuyo nombre...* can be trimmed away, until presumably only a skeletal substantive frame is left which conveys an essential fact. What this fact conveys will be a picture in the mind whose existence does not rely on a particular series of words, but on the concepts they convey: «Es decir, las

palabras no son la realidad del lenguaje, las palabras - sueltas - no existen»³⁰³

Such a statement is hardly startling these days. One can find intricate, and by now even venerable, elaborations of it under the pen of the post-Russellites, particularly the later Wittgenstein, Quine, Austin and Searle. For the last twenty years it has been the main plank supporting the Davidsonian school's assaults on the learnability of language. A strict adherence to grammatical rules alone is shown to be wholly inadequate for the establishment of meaning. Davidson might even have begun his work from Borges' riposte: «Esta doctrina se apoya en el consenso del vulgo y los diccionarios la fortalecen».³⁰⁴

Borges' functionalist approach to language mainly derives from his reading of Croce.³⁰⁵ For Borges Crocean aesthetic theory locates meaning not in the words alone composing sentences, but in the conceptual complexes created by them. The abstraction that grammatical analysis implies comes later and is added to the theory of meaning as an aid to understanding. In other words, we add explanations to what we already understand at a conceptual level to augment that understanding by tying it to another system of meaning. The process is infinitely expandable.³⁰⁶ As "understanding" grows so too do the ways in which the basic conceptual framework is linked to a network of supporting explanations. (Think of your own understanding of electricity at age five as a magic *force*, then at primary school level as the *jerky progress of electrons*, then in high school physics as an *electrostatic dynamic*, all of which still contain the notion of an elemental *force*.)³⁰⁷ The important thing to remember is that for Croce the *conceptual* and the *linguistic* don't necessarily coincide, a point Borges uses for his attack on a semantic basis for syntactic sense.³⁰⁸ This is supported by the fact of non-linguistic conceptualisation: we may have a feeling about an experience that stubbornly refuses to be put in a linguistic straitjacket. Hence artistic (aesthetic) experience is not fundamentally expressible in words, a fact borne out by the instantaneous impression of the beautiful on the imagination, even though we can't say why it has affected us.³⁰⁹

Borges finds this idea also supplied by Manuel de Montolíu's exegesis of Crocianism, *El lenguaje como fenómeno estético* that adds the important detail that the sentence might be the essential fact of

linguistic reality. Montolíu finds a sentence does not obey a mechanical regimen of logical atomicity, but functions as,

*...un organismo expresivo de sentido perfecto, que tanto comprende una sencilla exclamación como un vasto poema.*³¹⁰

We seem to have further fuel for Borges' anti-syntacticism here. However, he takes issue with Montolíu's conclusion. His own investigation of the remarkable redundancy of language serves to undermine the grammatical doctrine that words name particular concepts. Because of this he cannot accept the possibility that Montolíu's 'expressive organism' may actually embody a sense that occludes the basic separability of words in their grammatical categories. There are basic differences between verbs and articles, pronouns and adjectives, even if they do seem to have once been engendered by a single act of verbal ostensibility. The six separate words of the phrase *En un lugar de la Mancha* can be logically condensed into the substantive place name *Mancha*. Yet, the idea that *En un lugar de la Mancha* could name a particular concept is implausible. How would one determine that this group of words can be grasped in a single act of cognition without acknowledging that every *other* group of words might be grasped in the same way? Because such a group is arbitrary, and one could substitute alternatives for the prepositions as well as the substantives (this is close to the way that languages are constructed in Borges' idealist fantasy of *Tlön*) would this not imply that individual acts of cognition might also be arbitrary, and if so how could Croce's conceptual elementalism be sustained?

Borges appears to be at an impasse here. Words are, and are not, particular parts of the conceptual universe, just as phrases, sentences, paragraphs, can also be considered as *parts* of any whole, and just as these new wholes go on to form new parts of newer wholes, and so on. Borges needs a principle of differentiation that will allow him to delimit the bounds of language on a basis other than that of infinitely expanding sequence. Enter the concept. Working at the level of the syntactic group Borges elaborates on Spiller's observation that what appear to be single words often include a conceptual range of associations peculiar to their class.³¹¹ It's obvious *la Mancha* is a proper name and is not merely composed of an article and a

substantive. If we change the substantive to the adjective *manchego* (literally “Mancha-an”) it retains its identity as a proper name, only the visual form of the word has changed. Its conceptual identity is intact. Following Spiller’s insight Borges analyses the sentence *En un lugar de la Mancha de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme* into the four phrasal groups *En un lugar / de la Mancha / de cuyo nombre / no quiero acordarme /*. Here each phrasal group is both composed of words in the syntactic sense, but retains its elemental unity in the semantic sense. Words, and the concepts they convey, become distinguishable only by an artificial separation between sense and meaning, or by a shift of attention between connotative and denotative value.

Such a view is useful for Borges’ “psychologism” of words because it allows the grammatical objects to which no obvious sense can be ascribed, such as prepositions and possessives, to function as little bundles of verbal anticipation. *En*’(in) is described as a ‘promise of other [words] that will follow’, while *un* (a) is ‘the warning of a real existence’ and so on.³¹² For Borges words (in the loosest sense of the term as marks or sounds to which meanings can be attached) obey a regimen of psychological association. Words may not even be grammatical wholes, but only groups of syllables:

*Llámase palabra la sílaba o conjunto de sílabas que tiene existencia independiente para expresar una idea.*³¹³

Borges is able to synthesise the Crocean view of the elemental concept with his own reflections on connotative linguistic value. Any syllable may do for a word so long as it expresses an idea that can be located as an independent fact of conceptual experience. Thus, the twelve little packages of verbal anticipation in the sentence *En un lugar de la Mancha de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme* are sufficient to supply a series of independent senses no longer requiring the names Word or Sentence to justify them.

Any conjunction of syllables does equally well: «La representación no tiene sintaxis».³¹⁴ One might make a series of arbitrary separations of these fourteen famous words, cutting them into combinations of syllables, and still have sense to work with. This implies if there were such words in Spanish as *enun*, *lugardela* and *manchade* the

concepts they were associated with would supply their sense equally well.³¹⁵ Words exist only in the presence of other words, by which they're inevitably coloured by the linguistic associations of the individual who perceives them. Because of this rather chaotic existence their heterodoxical nature is assumed. They have no identity as entity. «[L]a no existencia de las categorías gramaticales» disproves them as anything but floating symbols of conceptual expectation waiting to be interpreted according to our first impressions.³¹⁶ Words are still important as such, for without these symbols there would be no way to pursue this discussion, but their importance is better seen in relation to their *activity* with other words than in themselves.

3.1.7 Borges' Virtuous Errors of Metaphor

How is one to determine how these symbols may be manipulated by the subject in a way fitting with Borges' magic causality? If the meaning of words is truly unfixable, and relies on the special conceptual apparatus of the individual, then how can Borges expect his fictions to produce the general conceptual effect he hopes for? If Mallarmé is correct that naming an object suppresses the pleasure of discovery, and the true nature of poetry is to merely suggest it, then how can we ever be guaranteed that the reader will be astute enough to follow our clues?³¹⁷ Borges doesn't provide an explicit answer, but makes the intriguing observation that he'd once tried to write *la luna de plata* (the silver moon) and it had come out as *la luna de arena* (the sand moon) through a visual association between the brightnesses informing the two images.³¹⁸ From this he infers such mistakes can only serve to augment linguistic resources since they give us more metaphors to choose from and recombine, whether by chance or design.³¹⁹ (This is not, however, to confuse linguistic resources with conceptual ones, which are acknowledged to be very small: «No de intuiciones originales - hay pocas -, sino de variaciones y casualidades y travesuras, suele alimentarse la lengua ».)³²⁰ This is in 1928, yet Borges was to make a similar mistake fifty-four years later in a 1982 interview when he misremembered the title of a collection of poems, *Historia de la noche* as *Historia de la luna*.³²¹ One might be ready to forgive an old man's memory and be satisfied were it not for the fact Borges also mentions in the same sentence the title of another collection, *El libro de arena*. The chain of association is

clear enough: the triplet *moon:sand:silver* seems to live a life of its own as a thrice-named concept, that of brightness.³²² Borges' view that the number of metaphors is small and they can be mostly resolved into conceptual primitives (which appears to contradict his statements on the heterodoxical character of words)³²³ is still a consistent plank upon which to build a theory of verbal relations. The theory has at its heart the play between syntactic orthodoxy and semantic serendipity. When he remarks that 'the pleasure (of metaphors) - their sufficient and minimum pleasure - is in their variety, in the heterogenous contact of their words' he appears to be expressing a thought that not even a trifling fault of memory can deny.³²⁴ Confusing the brightness of moon, sand and silver is not really confusing them at all, since these conceptual tokens are being brought under the heading of the quality that allows them into being in the first place. Indeed, trying to change one of them embarks us on a course of disruptive oxymoronising that destroys their conceptual unity. A 'dark moon' is an intriguing idea in isolation, but it forces a radical disjuncture upon the original effulgent triplet, and casts it into conceptual chiaroscuro. And while we enjoy the play of light and shade, it is impossible for Borges to incorporate it into a means of creating the unitary experience that he appears to be groping for in his investigation of verbal conceptualisation. Words, as little parcels of intention, seem to bang into each other like mismanaged rolling-stock. What he needs is a way of inserting buffers between them that are not seen solely conceptually, but as the product of our apprehension *during the process of reading*. What Borges needs is a postponement device, a device that will allow the reading intelligence to shunt the grammatical functions of language while it arranges and assigns these functions to different intentional-engines for the long haul to meaning.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 3.2

Borges extends his theory to narrative action, which is seen as the accumulation and arrangement of cognitive effects in the text. These effects go to construct conceptual objects whose progressive interaction furnishes action in narrative. Borges scales-up the action theory to wider social constructs, theorising syntax as world structuration. However, he never loses sight of the basic atoms of linguistic operation: words in the clash of metaphoric juxtaposition. Using Bishop Wilkin's theory of verbal idealisation, Borges conceptualises language as the function of its metaphoric operation. Because the epic concretises cultural, and therefore conceptual, values, it is the ideal place to look for formative conceptual apparatuses. However, it is not merely the number of words that determine a language's fecundity - paradoxically it is languages with a small lexis that are obliged to make the most fruitful and polyvalent metaphors. Borges extends this idea to Walt Whitman's work, seeing polyvalent metaphoric evocation as an indicator of the poet's power to create enduring idealisations

3.2 *Modal Description and Formal Postponement*

'Indagación de la palabra' develops, like so many of Borges' essays, by the conjunction of two ideas that have been at first hardly distinguishable, then heated antagonists, and finally involved in wary reconciliation. Having critiqued the idea of the necessity for syntax in the production of meaning (demonstrating that phrases with prepositions can be reduced to their logical atomicity, and as such the mere presence, not to say the arrangement, of prepositions is dispensable), he acknowledges the importance of syntax as a *formal contrivance* for ordering thought, confessing

*...(no sin algún irónico desengaño) que la menos imposible clasificación de nuestro lenguaje es la mecánica de oraciones de activa, de pasiva, de gerundio, impersonales y las que restan.*³²⁵

While this seems a contradiction, and a plea for arbitrary order in the kingdom of words, these grammatical classifications operate at a higher level of abstraction than their syntactic components.³²⁶ While the actual grammatical name of a word, be it 'preposition,' 'article' or 'substantive' can't, as Borges believes, determine the activity of the word in its interaction with other verbal signs, the ways in which groups of words are held to interact within the sentence-frame may be accurately described by the grammatical names given to their voice, or subject-position. Thus, Borges' belief in the usefulness of classification springs from the acceptance of *modal* argument, in that the subject finds its existence in a certain range of possibilities. If words don't exist at the level of individual particles of thought, but always rely on their contextual environment to lend them the necessary colour stopping them fading into linguistic transparency, the formal classification of the ways in which they operate functions as a metatheory of signification.

The theory, like all good conceptualisations, appears logical enough, but really relies on quite arbitrary ideas. The active voice, for instance, obeys the metaphorical transcription of *activity* in general: the subject "acts" upon the object. The reverse for the passive voice: the subject is passive and is therefore acted upon. Here grammar obeys an associative regulation transferred from the world of physical objects to

the semantic regimen describing them. However, in themselves these tidy regulations have no necessary connection with the things they describe. In other words, a theory of classification, even one as ground-breaking as Borges' parallel discovery of Saussure's view of language as a system of relations rather than as a formal codification, sheds no light on the relationship between the way language describes things, and the physical events that the theory describes.³²⁷ What similarity is there really between the series of marks and sounds of "The winning conversion was kicked by Jane" and the facts of Jane's triumph in the AFL Grand Final?³²⁸

3.2.1 The Management of Conceptual objects in the Text: Towards a Theory of Action

Borges' belief in words as the signifiers of things is plain enough. However, this belief extends only to "conceptual" objects and is constituted in an entirely substantive realm, an early hint of what would come in the paradise of the *Tlönistas* who had eliminated all nouns as merely redundant verbs and adjectives.³²⁹ The job of the work of art is to present these conceptual objects, or ideas in the philosophical sense, in such a way that their similarities can be glimpsed. Borges elaborates:

*Todas las ideas son afines o pueden serlo. Los contrarios lógicos pueden ser palabras sinónimas para el arte: su clima, su temperatura emocional suele ser común.*³³⁰

The words in the triplet *moon:sand:silver* certainly qualify as different, yet their 'climate' is the same in that they connote brightness, that is to say a radiant luminosity. What part may the formal aspects of grammar have to play in determining how we understand their emotional temperature? In 'Indagación de la palabra' Borges had dismissed the idea of the effectiveness of the physical arrangement of words in determining meaning. This followed as a corollary of his argument for the unity of concepts: words convey ideas, and these ideas are single expressions of phenomena. Where two words combine, as in substantive-adjectival couples like the English *brown horse* and the Spanish *caballo colorado*, he finds these couples convey a single idea that is a fact of objective experience.³³¹ Yet, such an admission undermines his position on the implicit strangeness of metaphor. Metaphors may attempt to convey unities of conception

but, if they're effective, they leave one with a residual sensation of unease through the «fusión arbitraria de los enigmas». ³³² If radical defamiliarisation is the key to understanding the power of metaphor, how can this position be reconciled with the counter-proposal that the business of magic causality is to present a series of textual objects whose explicit description would otherwise detract from the joy of progressive discovery - «la felicidad de ir adivinando»? ³³³ Such textual objects might already be conceptual unities if they're to be apprehended in such a way as to allow us to naturalise them to experience. If the process of defamiliarisation through the presentation of strange metaphors were to occur constantly, we would be unable to locate (dis-cover) the textual objects of experience in order for them to be “magico-causally” subsumed under the conceptual unity the story (*ficción*) intends to convey. ³³⁴ What is needed for the two positions to be reconciled is a hierarchical arrangement of firstly, concepts in experience, and secondly, concepts in the reading imagination, these arising as new combinations of previous experience. As Barthes notes: ‘it is precisely the syntagm of the denoted message (i.e. the concept in experience) which naturalises the system of the connoted message (i.e. the concept in the reading imagination).’ ³³⁵ In this way the two ideas that *silver* and *moon* convey separately could be synthesised into their respective conjunctions when they're found in the text, becoming in effect autonomous textual objects subsumed under the governing image of terrible whiteness, or brightness, revealed at the conclusion of A. Gordon Pym's antarctic adventure.

Borges explores this idea in a biographical essay, eponymously titled, on the Argentine statesman and author Eduardo Wilde. ³³⁶ Borges uses the piece to criticise what he thinks to be the excessive reliance on technical style in Argentine writing in general, a tendency that he'd also attack in ‘El idioma de los argentinos’ the essay giving the collection its title. ³³⁷ That Eduardo Wilde has slipped into the sleep of the libraries is unimportant. Borges uses his work as a platform from which to praise the fantastic in literature, a fantastic that is made all the more *realistic* through the creation of vivid imagery. The spring that allows it to do so is based on the complementary interaction between form and content, a technique of composition that competent writers must perfect if their work is to be thought worth remembering:

Emparejar el sentimiento o pensamiento con la dicción, igualar el contenido y la forma, es una virtud que todos aconsejan y nadie ejerce. ¿Como ejercerla, además? ¿Acaso hay una preferida y siempre cumplidora relación de igualdad entre los fenómenos de la consciencia y las leyes sintácticas de un lenguaje? ³³⁸

He concludes there is indeed a way to accomplish this, and bases the idea on a modification of Croce. Here we have the beginnings of a theory of action that explains the correlation between the semantic and the conceptual in the reading imagination. For Croce concepts are received into consciousness and reinforced by successive stimulation. This stimulation creates a pattern of understanding which is a unique reflexion of the syntactical structure of the language in which they occur. Thus, things in the world are mirrored by things in the head - whether we call them concepts as Croce does, or use the current nomenclature of neurological science makes no difference: what matters is that there is a conceptually constructed *something* internal to the perceiver that is sufficiently like another semantically constructed *something* outside in the world, so that one can be said to represent the other for all practical purposes.

Of course, in such an explanation, the order in which the parts of the concept are constructed will be of great importance. Despite Borges' earlier dismissal of the order of adjectives and substantives in couples, he is obliged to admit that the order of a concept's components is crucial to the reading imagination's apprehension, a point he himself relies upon in his discussion of the opening sentence in *Don Quijote*. Prepositions and articles can be compressed into what they name like so many balls of plasticine, but the order in which they are squeezed together is still admitted to be rather orthodox, with the noun considered as the nub of meaning onto which its modifiers are obediently adhered. As such the noun assumes supreme importance in the semantic scheme of things. Its presence guarantees that somethings is being said *about* something, while its position as the kernel of meaning guarantees that what is being said about it occupies a subordinate position. This is particularly cogent in the case of adjectival substantive couples. Borges assumes that when we read, we read searching for the nouns in a sentence as anchor-points upon which to hang a panoply of secondary effects. When we find a noun the position of its principal modifier, the adjective, must be

accounted for in time as well as space. In other words, placing an adjective *in front of the noun* changes our perception of it. The adjective “colours” the noun before we get to it: in reading the English sentence-head “The Prime Minister’s speech was an exercise in fatuous...” we are constrained to finish it with only those terms that are commonly associated with the fatuous, like “rhetoric” or “self-applause”. We read the noun-group “The Prime Minister’s speech”³³⁹ as the subject of the sentence as a material fact of existence first (speeches, no matter how fatuous, do exist as phenomena we are all familiar with) before assigning it the value of “fatuous” or “self-applaudatory”. We are, in effect, *postponing* the initial noun-group’s value while we mentally select fitting alternatives, short-listing the most commonly associated, and hold them ready to apply to the noun as we continue to the full-stop. If this were not the case then ending the sentence describing the Prime Minister’s speech with the word “humility” would cause us no surprise. (Borges, in contradistinction to Saussure, assumes that language understanding operates first as a progressively activated conditioned reflex at the semantic level, while only emerging as a syntagmatic construct *after* the fact of reading.) However, how will this progressive and sequential view of language operate where the order of primal noun and its modifier is reversed? What about languages that rely on adjectival post-fixation, like Spanish? Using the example of the English couple *brown horse* and the Spanish *caballo colorado* Borges infers the English mind is accustomed to conceiving the *colour* before the *animal*, while Hispanophones conceive the beast before a consideration of its particular hue:

*Los ingleses dicen obligatoriamente a brown horse, un colorado caballo; nosotros, obligatoriamente tambien, posponemos el adjetivo.*³⁴⁰

3.2.2 Syntax as World Structuration

This makes the Spanish-speaker an intrinsically materialistic and concretizing thinker, an assertion Borges was to maintain as the cause of a conceptual difference between the two languages.³⁴¹ It also leads, in embryo, to an explanation of Borges’ frequent use of what has become known as the “hesitation effect” in his writing. The term owes its induction into literary theory due to a 1970 work by the Franco-Bulgarian structuralist Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la*

littérature fantastique.³⁴² As Gene H. Bell-Villada, a little sceptically, explains:

*An indispensable trait, as Todorov sees it, of fantastic literature, this so-called hesitation stems from an essential ambiguity as to the precise nature of the given events in a fantastic narration - factual versus hallucinatory, realistic versus symbolic, objective versus subjective. This radical elusiveness unsettles the reader, who hesitates between the two possible readings and never succeeds in resolving them.*³⁴³

This is however, a misreading of Borges' view, since the sequential understanding of text is always prior to its syntagmatic understanding, but it lets Todorov work parts of the early Borges up into grand expressions of his later art. Later Todorov hits on a parallel to magic causality he calls 'imaginary causality'³⁴⁴ where the events in a narration appear to be working themselves out under the watchful eye of a general causal principle.

Hesitation in narrative is the stable device of dramatic suspense. Borges' favourite detective authors use it habitually. In fact, it's inseparable from the suspense tale. Beyond its use as a dislocational device in the supposed continuity of discourse, it also functions in its traditional way to create expectations for a culminative action in the conclusion.³⁴⁵ Melville's *Moby Dick* is one long postponement of the ultimate meeting of Ahab and the terrible white whale. Poe's *Peter Snook* is a paragon of narrated events, insignificant in themselves, operating under the power of a causal principle. In this case it's the impersonation of the genuine hero, which is the echo of Poe's own purpose in composing the satirical review.³⁴⁶ Thus, the causal principle is immune to ironic effects, it operates as a bare concatenation of events, a description of action whose reverses (and we think of Borges' embedded narratives where one character dreams another), can all be rightly interpreted as interruptions of the original sequential narrative. For Borges, both the real and the fantastic coexist, but it is the real that gives narrative itself as subject for treatment by fantasy. In a reversal of the old syntagmatic paradigm that sees positive choices determined by their negative alternatives, for Borges just as realism is inconceivable without the real, so the fantastic is inconceivable without fantasy.

One sees how the postponement effect is a tiny genetic element of a larger narrative principle. The postponement of the attributes of a concept in the Spanish verbal complex *caballo colorado* obliges readers to constantly fix their attention to a substantive universe waiting to be described. A *brown horse* presents the same phenomenon even though the order has been reversed. We momentarily hesitate after *brown* and mentally cast about amongst a selection of common nouns (house? leaf? hair?) for a suitably syntagmatic candidate to complete it. Hesitation is built into language, which is the crux of Borges' argument about the vitality of metaphor relying on defamiliarisation. If our expectations are held up for a sufficient length of time, between the atoms of sense composing language at its most elemental level, the meaning of a phrase becomes momentarily unrecognisable, producing a subtle thrill of confusion.³⁴⁷

Borges was to continue his investigation of the apprehension of verbal complexes in 'El idioma de los argentinos'. Complaining the title is rather verbose, «un travesura sintáctica», he goes on to explain that such pranks are an inescapable fact of linguistic composition. Where the world lacks a unique physical object to represent in a single word the author is obliged to force nouns, prepositions and adjectives into uneasy cohabitation. In the case of *poesía pura*, or *movimiento continuo*, the author is obliged to resort to an expedient no reality sustains.³⁴⁸ (How can poetry be "pure" or "impure" for that matter? Surely it simply is, or is not, poetry.) Borges finds the reason we have these verbal monsters is that they were formed *accidentally* (i.e. they quite literally "fall to" the nouns they describe) and have now accreted a quasi-independent significance. Their invention is fortuitous, but the reason they persist is aesthetic and psychological:

*...cuando las atracciones inmediatas de una hermosura o las de su bien cuidado recuerdo están sobre nosotros, ¿quién no ha sentido que las palabras elogiosas que ya preexisten, son como proféticas de ella, como corazonadas?*³⁴⁹

3.2.3 The Conceptual Hesitancy Of Syntagms

This view of semantic composites isn't very startling in itself, but when read in the context of Borges' description of the conceptual hesitancy

of metaphor, verbal complexes seem to be informed by a process of historical development, even if the history is a little hazy. Let's look at it on two levels, the syntactic and the semantic. The syntax of a language dictates the order in which substantive and attributive signifiers can be laid down in a sentence.³⁵⁰ However, the semantic value of these words, what they literally mean, is determined by reference to a real world in which nouns signify concrete objects. In modern semiotics, when we come to a noun that is described by an adjective, we have to decide which of the two is more concrete, and allow it to be coloured by its modifier: in the act of reading adjective and noun create a syntagm in which modifier and modified, or signifier and signified, are apprehended as *sign*. In Borges' view, on the other hand, because reading is a basically sequential act, we apprehend the first word we come to as a primal noun, even when it looks like an adjective, into which a concrete object-word has been collapsed in the course of history. Yet, the adjective still has its syntactic function as modifier, so that in the act of reading we are continually faced with pseudo-adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and articles whose syntactic character must be recognised (where they come in the sequence) and whose semantic function (what they refer to in the sequence) must be identified immediately after. (This is the only way that Borges' comments on how language seeks to describe the world can be meaningfully interpreted. Even when it fails, it fails according to its own syntactic rules.) Such a reading practice creates a pattern of postponement, since we must hold the term we apprehend in readiness for its application to the term that follows it, if we are to get the sense of the sentence right. While we are holding the term in our mind, we must be aware of both its syntactic and semantic values, since if we were not we could neither assign it to a place in the sentence, nor assign it to the term that it usually modifies. Thus, Anglophones are conditioned to inhabit either a "nominal" universe (the *brown* horse where the horse is named or described by its adjective) or, if Spanish-speakers, a "phenomenal" one, where *el caballo colorado* obtains - the horse showing the colour to be not only brown, but horse-pertaining too.

However, how does history get into the act? When words are arbitrarily combined into verbal complexes like *el idioma argentino*, or the equine examples above, the individual words composing them are felt to have had a pre-existent affinity. Their union is literally legalised

by adjectives and nouns being so often seen in each other's company.³⁵¹ Historically their de facto marriage becomes legalised in time, and so their long association prophesies their present coupling and takes on the *formal* character we call correct syntax. Two words could go together, so long as the syntactic rules of the language in which they occur are obeyed. Thus, the syntagm "*Argentine idiom*", which has become a conceptual object of strong patriotic attraction to the Argentines, is felt to have been waiting for its birth in a proto-nationalistic pre-history. Who has not, he asks, felt that the national adjectives that we have today are not like prophesiers of nationhood, the very crowning of national identity?³⁵²

Even though Borges may be being ironic there are obvious implications for his perception of the role of text, even at the basic level of word couples, in the creation of national identity. The great works of a culture are somewhere, prior to the artist's even knowing he or she wants them, waiting to be born. Art, particularly narrative art in this case, is a Platonic inevitability awaiting its material transcription in the world. It sounds fantastic, but this is a plausible explanation of Borges' comments about his own works as an oeuvre waiting to be born.³⁵³ The process is open-ended. Or rather, the writer occupies an intermediate space between what has gone before and what follows, both in himself and the work of others:

*I think a writer is being changed all the time by his output. So that perhaps at first what he writes is not relevant to him. And if he goes on writing, he'll find that those things are ringing a bell all the time.*³⁵⁴

3.2.4 The System of Bishop Wilkins

At this point let us go forward thirty years to snatch a relatively obscure piece of writing from the Borgesian corpus and insert it into the discussion of how we use linguistic concepts in creating everyday mental life. In 1952 Borges was to publish a short essay titled 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins' where he posits the view that how we *talk* about things emerges from how we *think* about them.³⁵⁵ The essay is important not only for its insight on the nature of the inverse relationship between materiality and idealism, but also because of what it implies about how we come to know a particular discourse, and recognise its internal components. Writers, as Borges remarks above, are always being changed by their output,

intellectually adjusting themselves to their work's reception as it enters the possibly hostile environment of public comment. In support of this view one need only quote Borges' comment on Kafka's creating his own precursors,³⁵⁶ an ironic aside on his own increasing fame, or mention his allegories of creative recognition, such as 'La escritura del Dios' where the imprisoned priest of an Aztec pyramid sees the secret of the universe in the calligraphic pelt of a jaguar.³⁵⁷ For Borges the world is a semantic environment where subjects are culturally regulated by the concepts their particular syntactic apparatus allows them to recognise. This determines the broader channels into which metaphoric language flows through special regimes of association. Subjects are determined by their languages, and the conceptual apparatus that these languages embody reflects their range of allusions, which in turn delimit the metaphorical opportunities that give a language its particular richness. It's a bit like telling a six year old they can have anything they like for Christmas...*as long as it's educational*. Before long parent and child are locked in a heated debate on pedagogic worthiness, unaware that their choices for present-buying have been subtly curtailed by the contemporary master discourse of sociology. Although in these post-Foucaultian days this point of view is no longer revolutionary, it isn't bad for a still internationally obscure Latin American poet writing in 1952.

Borges uses Wilkins' theory to explore the view that language is determined by its internal conceptual apparatus. In 1668 Wilkins published six hundred meticulous quarto pages entitled *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* where he set out a logical system for concept-building. The title is not wishful thinking - Wilkins does believe that the reality of one's character results from its owner's philosophical language. The system is analytical: from a relatively small number of primitive concepts any number of abstractions can be constructed.³⁵⁸ It's also hierarchical and taxonomic, owing its devolution from categories and genres into species mostly to Aristotle. The system has the advantage of being regular and easy to comprehend - two factors no doubt ensuring its immediate failure and posthumous obscurity.

Reading of the eccentric Wilkins no doubt confirmed Borges in his opinion of the paucity of truly elemental metaphors. The originary

generators are tiny compared to their progeny, a theme of generative signification central to 'The Library of Babel' and 'The Lottery in Babylon', and is at the heart, as Daniel Bell in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* shows, of our modern unease about just what limits we need set on the commodity of knowledge.³⁵⁹ However, Borges' theory of conceptual postponement also plays a part, at least teleologically. Subjects are constrained by a conceptual apparatus fashioned, at least in part, by the way they use language.³⁶⁰ And language has acted to condition their universe along nominal or phenomenal lines, as in the example of the English inhabiting a universe populated by appearances, and the Spanish (and by implication the French, Italians, Portuguese, etc.) inhabiting one of substantial solidity. Wilkins' system is hierarchical, but its rationale, because he is an Englishman, is nominal. The categories constructing his universe are categories of things that may be named, not appearances that must be described. From spirit we devolve to men, from men to animals, from animals to plants, and so on until all the physical universe has been named. Such things are real in the sense that we can have an idea of them. They're elements of conceptual reality. In the case of spirits they're *real* in the same way something we believe in, but can't see at the moment, is real. They're objects of belief, like the events in a narrative. Given such a system, it's natural to posit two opposing lines of conceptual stress. On the one hand the higher up the scale we go the more real, but the less substantial, objects of perception become. Spirits are less substantial than stones, but stones may fail to excite the enthusiasm of the theologian. On the other hand stones are brute facts of existence and rather indifferent to argument. Their substantial reality is massive, yet their conceptual reality is slight. (We "know" about stones, but they're unlikely to keep us awake at night, unless they're rubies or sapphires, in which case we have loaded them with an artificial conceptual reality based on our imaginary relations with capitalism.) This leads to a basic contradiction in the way we view the world tending to idealism: the more substantial a thing is the less ideal it must be and hence its relegation to the lower realms of Wilkins' metaphorical universe. The more *insubstantial* (and by implication spiritual) a thing is the higher its position, yet the higher it is the more it becomes loaded with associations and imaginations. In other words, its *attributes* become more numerous, multiplying to create its allusive perimeter. If, as Borges believes, it's the order of apprehension of noun and adjective

determining whether we see the world as a collection of things (el *caballo* colorado), or of the qualities things have (the *brown* horse), Wilkins' system acts to cut across the cultural and conceptual divide. Things like stones, men, and spirit, are less substantial and more infected by qualities of perception as they ascend the scale, regardless of the culture that produces them. The separation, in Wilkins' system, of the human subject and the semi-divine qualities informing it as the noblest creation of an almighty God, is quite literally unthinkable. So too stones and metals tend to evaporate as their affinity with the divine decreases. This leads to a teleological contradiction. In order for the world to become more conceptually real it must become less conceptually substantial. Yet, the act of naming is a way of maintaining an intrinsically substantial relation to the world: things, real things, have names. In naming something we implicitly assume the object to exist. To name is to be a materialist, in the way the devout and children are materialists. As Borges explains in his 1952 essay on the subject:

*Las palabras del idioma analítico de John Wilkins no son torpes símbolos arbitrarios; cada una de las letras que las integran es significativa, como lo fueron las de la Sagrada Escritura para los cabalistas. Mauthner observa que los niños podrían aprender ese idioma sin saber que es artificioso; después en el colegio, descubrirían que es también una clava universal y una enciclopedia secreta.*³⁶¹

However, to name is also to become less of an idealist, and therefore further from the spiritual discoveries such a system is supposed to foster.³⁶² Naming the world brings it into intimate real contact with us and makes it less abstract. The only way to maintain contact with a world *meant* to slip away from us as we ascend to spiritual enlightenment is to project ideal qualities onto real objects. Thus, the substantial becomes infused by the insubstantial. In poetry the moon becomes an eye, both of which operate as signs of sight, one of the most mysterious of phenomena. However, the process also works in reverse. To maintain a feeling of immanence about the world the ideal must be made substantial again. Sleep and death, two very insubstantial things, become mutually informative, as do life and dream. To die is to sleep with the promise of waking, life can therefore be thought of as a dream before *real* wakefulness in Paradise, a point

of view helpful to both British Anglicanism as well as Borges' celebrated idealist fantasies.³⁶³

3.2.5 *Genesis of Language Through the Epic*

Under such a regime it is inevitable Borges should maintain the number of primary metaphors is small. Before the profusions of the technological age human wants were limited to manageable poetic dimensions. Borges' elementalism is a consequence of the historical view in literature and philosophy. This view sees human linguistic development arranged according to devolvments from a primitive canon, *The Iliad*, *the Bible*, *Don Quijote*, etc. In 'The Idioma de los argentinos' he comments that in a lexical survey by Count Casa Valencia for the Spanish Academy the learned grammophile had discovered that, while the French national dictionary only managed to classify thirty-one thousand words, the Spanish national dictionary came up with around sixty thousand. Would this mean Spanish is almost twice as descriptively powerful as its French rival? Just the opposite. Paradoxically, the greater the lexical resources of a language the less, it appears, it has to say. The power of language lies not in its explicit descriptions, but in its covert ones. Because Spanish has so many different words from which to choose, the author - and all language-users are inevitably authors - is reduced to an exercise in selection instead of a journey in imagination:

*La prueba se efectúa siempre con el francés: prueba en que hay trampa, porque la cortedad léxica de ese idioma es economía y ha sido estimulada por sus retóricos. Servicial o no, el vocabulario chico de Racine es deliberado. Es austeridad, no indigencia.*³⁶⁴

3.2.6 *How Lexical Proliferation Works Against Itself*

The poetic conjunctions that have the power to shock and amaze can't arise so frequently in Spanish simply because there is always a right word to use that describes a situation adequately. Borges also mentions a trap. The pitfall into which the mathematical argument stumbles is laid by the apparently greater vocabulary of English, which weighs in at around one hundred thousand words, half as many again as Spanish. Logically this makes English a less metaphorically generative language than either Spanish or French. Whatever it is, the English will have a word for it. What then accounts for the

metaphoric fecundity of Shakespeare? The reason an economic approach to linguistic resources fails is that it fails to take cultural politics into account. The Spanish of the New World had long been seen as a medium of political independence, as well as a matrix for the incorporation of indigenous idiom. Consequently regional expression had evolved a twitchy self-consciousness regarding cultural aspirations. Not only does Argentina have a poetic dialect for the port of Buenos Aires and the Río de la Plata (lunfardo) it also boasts an idiom for the lower socio-economic class (arrabal) and another for the cattle-producing pampas of the interior (orillero) all of which are, of course, deviations from standard Castilian. And this list doesn't include the dialects of Tupí and Guaraní spoken in the North West. As Borges indicates, the pressure of vigorous Spanish colonisation, the wars for independence of the early 19th century, and the management of language to foster political cohesion, had created a culture of linguistic schizophrenia emerging in the contradictory trends of Spanish cosmopolitanism and the celebration of a fragmentary Argentine regionalism. The major method of asserting linguistic independence was in the increase of lexical equivalents. In short, the parallel development of language by substituting a criollism for a Castilianism without having developed the allusive strategies to make language a part of culture. Borges was always aware language does not emerge in isolation, but as the outcome of a poetic mechanics, the key generative element of which is metaphor. Vocabulary functions only as 'outward riches' while metaphorical association produces 'essential riches'. As Sarlo notes in her investigation of Borges' relations with linguistic regionalism, Borges was keenly aware of the divide between linguistic production and poetic generation.³⁶⁵ In focussing on an imaginary view of language as an ordered system of symbolic production, he attempts to isolate himself from the social and cultural realities of the region:

*A man uses the correct, latinate term prostituta (prostitute). The dictionary immediately falls on his head, silencing him with words such as meretriz and buscona. The neighbourhood tough will add words such as yiro, yiradora, turra, mina, milonga. This does not demonstrate the richness of our language. It is, rather, showy demonstrativeness - since this junkyard of words does not help us to feel or think.*³⁶⁶

The 'richness' of a language is a euphemism then for linguistic decay. In the 'Wilkins' essay Borges even calls it a euphemism for connotative death.³⁶⁷ The mere production of different words can only lead to hollow duplications of the original words, a bit like knowing every synonym in a thesaurus for the word death, but never realising that death can be metaphorically transposed with sleep to produce one of the most enduring images in poetry. For Borges another danger, aside from being unpoetic, is that this duplication obtains not only at the level of basic expression but also extends to more complex components of literature. He'd noted the trend in 'Las *kenningar*' when he championed the 'decadence' of the *thulir*, or reciters of verse, due to their reliance on a stock of vivid metaphors, or kennings:

*...la buena composición de las metáforas - tumultuosa la una, cruel y detenida la otra - engaña ventajosamente al lector, permitiéndole suponer que se trata de una sola fuerte intuición de un combate y su resto. Otra es la desairada verdad.*³⁶⁸

We are advantaged, so to speak, by the series of associations the *kenning* can produce in the poetic imagination. Instead of perceiving a single image, we're called, involuntarily, to make sense of the conjunction of unfamiliar images through a series of submerged verbal relations.

3.2.7 Whitman

In a previous essay in *Discusión* published in 1932 Borges had outlined one way of getting around the conceptual limitations of language by refocussing on the role that creative biographical imagination can have in removing artists from the direct ambit of their particular works. The artist, through doubling himself as biographical entity *and* autobiographical fiction, escapes reality's need for historical self-reference. In 'El otro Whitman' Borges applies the principle of defamiliarisation to a study of one his favourite English-language poets. He also takes a swipe at the tendency of "schools" of literature to politicise poetry in terms of cliques, a phenomenon he'd experienced directly in Madrid and Seville with the rivalry between the *Ultraístas* and the *Surrealistas*, and later again in the early 1920s when the editorial conclave of *Martín Fierro* erupted into the Boedo-Florida controversy.³⁶⁹ One can't understand poets by exacting an economy of their works. The true worth of poets is gauged on the capability of

their words to invoke imagery. Whitman's work is monumental for Borges in the same way that the *Psalms*, or the first chorus of Aeschylus' *The Persians*, or Homer's catalogue of the ships in the *Iliad* is monumental, whose power derives not from its length, but from the «el delicado ajuste verbal» and «las "simpatías y diferencias" de las palabras».³⁷⁰ Whitman, despite the great quantity of his work, demonstrates a «laconismo trémulo y suficiente» carrying his true greatness to the world.³⁷¹ Borges, one of the first to do so, introduces a Spanish-speaking audience to the American poet in a selection of short quotations and translations from *Leaves of Grass* that will allow his laconic adjustments to show to best effect, including the lines:

*And of the threads that connect the stars and of wombs and of the father-stuff.*³⁷²

One sees immediately why Borges has selected such an example. The juxtaposition of celestial and profane images creates an interplay of sympathetic associations: the 'threads' connecting the 'stars' transfer the female icon of the 'womb' to a cosmic stage where the 'father-stuff' is played-out across the universe. The line is reminiscent of Borges' own 'Himno del mar' where an image of elemental Ocean is created by a series of explosive exultations:

*¡Oh mar! ¡Oh mito! ¡Oh sol! ¡Oh largo lecho!*³⁷³

The sea, as a verbal sign, becomes one element in a concatenation of reciprocating associations: the sea as myth, the sea as an elemental couple to the sun, the sea as a 'wide resting place'. This sea is clearly the *whale-road* of the *kenningar*, just as Whitman's poetic cosmogony evokes the legend in Greek mythology of Athena's creation of the Milky Way by wiping off Hephaestus' premature ejaculation into the night sky.

Borges was to amplify his debts to Whitman in another short essay, 'Note on Walt Whitman' where he links the creation of verbal images to the idea of a self-perpetuating universe of the sign:

*El ejercicio de las letras puede promover la ambición de construir un libro absoluto, un libro de los libros que incluya a todos como un arquetipo platónico, un objeto cuya virtud no aminoren los años.*³⁷⁴

Many have been afflicted with this notable ambition, from Apollonius of Rhodes to Mallarmé, who sought it not in positive works of art, but in a negative realm of symbolic absences. The list names Homer's *Odyssey* of course, but also includes Góngora's *Soledades*, and James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.³⁷⁵ Surprisingly Shakespeare and Tolstoy aren't mentioned, presumably because these authors already rely on metaphor as such, rather than on juxtapositions that lead to metaphors. Borges' criterion for the universal book obviously rests on the role we play in text construction. This provides Borges with a way of reintroducing us into artistic production in a pragmatic sense: books don't read books, people do.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 3.3

Borges theorises the universal work of literature as that which contains the greatest re-combinative possibilities. Because Whitman is able to describe events with such fecund metaphors, the factual nature of the reportage becomes less important than its power to evoke vivid, and therefore culturally permanent, images. Borges uses sacred literatures as examples of enshrined, but still metaphorically generative, text.

3.3 *Pragmatics of the text* ³⁷⁶

The Book of Books

The universal book is not a work of art in itself, but a system of generative possibilities. Thus, the “great work” of literature extending over a thousand pages can't be included. Length alone, you see, won't make a book in the least universal. (We see that Borges is not here reproducing Poe's prejudice against the novel - inherited from Aristotle's *Poetics* - and his sanguine approbation of literature short enough to be read in a single sitting.) However, Borges includes *Don Quijote* among the canon since its episodes embody constantly rearrangeable principles of human action. Because the episodes are short enough to be absorbed in a sitting we're merely re-arranging persistent elements of narrative rather than attempting to naturalise a single very long one that exhausts the imagination. Thus, for Borges *Don Quijote* is a lot more like a random juxtaposition of incidents that we make narrative sense of according to our inclinations, than a modern novel where reading is sequentially dictated by plot. The tumultuous inventories of Góngora's *Soledades* aspire to universality because of their catalogue-like richness. As an inventory of images they don't seek to weave a narrative thread, or describe a continuous psychological development. As Borges realises in quoting Mallarmé's line «*tout aboutit à un livre* », it's not necessary to construct a simulation of life to create life itself. ³⁷⁷ The life of symbols is nothing like the life of human beings, just as the ambition to create a book containing all books is not the dream of narration. The life of the sign, an existence of formal interactions, is actually the most artificial of ideas. Its power to affect human imagination comes from the equivocation of the symbolic realm with the ordinary life of psychological reactions, a regime of motivation and competing stimuli. Nature, the nature of art that is, is the delirium of this tangle. ³⁷⁸

3.3.1 *A Reconstructed Spectatorship*

To reinforce the difference between life and art Borges cites a number of Whitman's biographical details: although Whitman writes of Platte Canyon and California, he never went there. The biographical Whitman and the poetic Whitman are separate entities, one is a real collection of existential facts, and the other a creation of art and

publicity. This is not to say publicity is deception. Publicity creates in the same way all art creates, its resources are symbolic but its effects on the imagination are no less real for that. What Whitman creates is a participatory standpoint from which to view poetic and real events.³⁷⁹ It doesn't matter that he was never in California or the South, that he never witnessed the hanging of the Abolitionist John Brown in Virginia. *Year of Meteors* brought the event to life in a way that no newspaper report could ever do.

For Borges the task of the art work is not so much to reproduce life, but to *recreate* it. This recreation is literally beyond the page because the 'sympathies and differences' it lays down are beyond the facts of direct human experience. Their link with life is one of vicarious substitution and recombination. Beyond Whitman's jumbled imagery lies an exercise of imagination finding sense in a haphazard conjunction of factual experience. Borges notes a parallel in the more esoteric texts of religion and philosophy:

*El panteísmo ha divulgado un tipo de frases en las que se declara que Dios es diversas cosas contradictorias o (mejor aún) misceláneas. Su prototipo es éste: "El rito soy, la ofrenda soy, la libación de manteca soy, el fuego soy" (Bhagavadgita, IX, 16). Anterior, pero ambiguo, es el fragmento 67 de Heráclito: "Dios es día y noche, invierno y verano, guerra y paz, hartura y hambre."*³⁸⁰

This is pantheism, but it's a pantheism of human experience that will not allow itself to be revealed except by an act of symbolic participation.³⁸¹ In placing oneself between these contradictions of factual experience one is obliged either to accept them, or reject them. The act of rejection brings us to a brutish realism founded on the veracity of the eye-witness account: I was there, I saw it, therefore it exists. On the other hand the act of accepting Whitman's view brings us round again to the ideal universe of things and names - of things as names: I wasn't there, yet I saw it nonetheless.

Borges' Whitman is clearly on the side of the pragmatists.³⁸² If something is described then its existence is dependent on the degree to which its description can be incorporated into waking life. A great myth is neither moral nor unmoral, it's simply more or less effective as a means for stimulating belief. And what is the imagination but

another name for the act of belief? One can't imagine completely impossible things. Phantasies are always composed of elements that have been experienced in waking reality, and so we react to them as if they were really there before us - this is what makes nightmare such an effective experience.

3.3.2 *Contingent and Absolute Literatures*

Borges was to continue his investigation of the text - the absolute text - in 'Una vindicación de la Cábala' where he discusses the existence of a perfect book, uninfluenced by the contingencies of chance, dictated by the Holy Spirit.³⁸³ Such a book is also the reverse of literature, since in literature the chance effect is not so much unavoidable, as inescapable. As Jaime Alazraki points out, this makes it the ideal material for the paradigm of interpretation.³⁸⁴ If nothing is left to chance in the text, then everything occurring there must be loaded with significance. The task of the interpreter is merely to discover the text, which, since it can't be said to dissimulate its subject matter by rhetorical effects and clever turns of phrase (being the word of God, you see) might yield its meaning in a transparent fashion, provided the interpreter has the wit to see it. As John Donne puts it the Holy Spirit's a *copious* writer, but not a careless one.³⁸⁵

The Holy Spirit's also therefore the antithesis of the earthly author. Its own words are already dictated for it: as a part of the Trinity it partakes of the Godhead, and this Godhead is omniscient, omnipresent and eternal. Logically the chance effects of literature diminish geometrically the higher up the pyramid of spiritual writing we go. There are no fortuitous accidents for the Heavenly script writer.³⁸⁶

Borges notes that the cause of awe for this book is a direct association with its divine creator. The Holy Scripture is the mechanical production of God, the Evangelists as His secretaries, having no influence on the text they write. Inspiration favours transcription, not interpretation.³⁸⁷ In this way the text can remain free of the human hand. This view has improbable consequences when the *historical* texts of the Scriptures are considered: the *Formula consensus helvética*, a 16th century Protestant compendium of orthodox religious practice is supposed to declare that even the *punctuation* of the Bible is of divine origin, forgetting that orthographical symbols are of comparatively recent invention. Islam

makes no bones about the whole matter, the *Quran* is simply an attribute of God, the mother of the Book, and exists eternally.

The idea of a perfect text written by a perfect author places human interpretation in a precarious position. On one hand, the text being pure, any interpretation might be valid. On the other, the enormous number of competing interpretations shows Biblical exegesis is a perilous task. The human interpreter is faced with a dual problem: how to render the “meaning” of the text, and how to secure that meaning against the claims of others. This calls for the invention of a special relation of human beings to the written word that locates the interpreter as in some way part of the task of interpretation. This relationship is a mirror of the Trinity where the Holy Spirit is held as a mediator between God and the Son of God. The interpreter’s task is not merely to render the text visible, but to participate in an act of interpretation seen as part of the process of revelation.

Borges portrays the difference between earthly and heavenly texts in terms of the division between form and content. A newspaper report relies on its content: its form, apart from the standard literary conventions of the journalist, is incidental. Verse, regular verse that is, relies on strictly conventional standards of orthography, but these formal conventions on their own convey no sense to us. The sense of the poem relies on the combination of two sets of interpretations: the acoustic and the semantic. These are embedded in the body of the work, but their verbal armature, the graphic form of the piece, except in the experiment of the altar poem, plays no part in conveying sense. Nor does sense come with the regular and cumulative interpretation of the words: poetry is not a strictly logical operation. The metaphors of poetry operate outside the sequential order in which they have been laid down by the artist’s pen, cross-fertilising each other to create new meanings. That is, one likes to think, why poetry is poetry, and not journalism.

Sacred writing, on the other hand, can’t afford to take such liberties. Each word is significant, therefore its order is significant. In the absence of artistic criteria of judgement logical ones might take over. Holy Scripture is the word of God after all, and logically God might have said it as it was written. The order of the words thus takes on a primal significance that can’t obtain in poetry. For the cabbalist

Scripture is an exercise in narrative veracity, a type of sacred journalism. This leads to the contradiction of two interpretative ideals. The first is founded on the multiformity of human signification, the second on the divine uniformity of the Word. If the Word is, as we are reliably informed in Genesis, with God and *is* God, then human interpretation is superfluous. Yet, the human word is open to a variety of interpretations, a fact without which would, figuratively, spell the end of criticism. The human word might therefore be either a deviation from the Word, or a controversion of it. Thus, if we are engaged in the interpretation of the sacred we are also engaged in either our own transformation as vessels worthy to receive its special message, stemming from the sacred journalism theory, or engaged in its active perversion, which is the logical consequence of our presumption in describing what God is *really* saying. The resolution of these opposing viewpoints, if one is possible at all, would be a writing fulfilling both the criterion of the presentation of true events, and also of their interpretation as textual realities.

Borges attempts the resolution with his treatment of Whitman as the eternal author, and *Leaves of Grass* as the eternal book. The poems comprising it may not be literally true from the standpoint of the eye-witness account, but this is unimportant for a consideration of their true power as textual objects.³⁸⁸ For Borges what matters is Whitman's sensitivity to the essentials of writing, a sensitivity revealing itself in the,

*[S]implificación final del recuerdo, inconocibilidad y pudor de nuestro vivir, negación de los esquemas intelectuales y aprecio de las noticias primarias de los sentidos...*³⁸⁹

Here the sensitivities, through the senses, are elevated to the role of arbiters of poetic life. However, why chase off intellectual schemata by claiming that the idea of a definitive text is nothing more than a tired old religious idea?³⁹⁰ *Intellectualising* writing is how we come to recognise it as writing in the first place. One senses a philosophical divide coming up. Just as the Absolute Text is a logical idea, so is its Absolute Author. This way leads to Platonism, but also paradoxically to the destruction of Platonism itself. If the absolute text is acknowledged as a logical idea, then why shouldn't God be acknowledged likewise, and *both* be consigned to the vagaries of

human imagination?³⁹¹ The immediate consequences of such a speculation are atheism and materialism, two intellectually reasonable, but creatively unsatisfying, world-views. After all, like it or not, the search for an order of being outside ourselves is an empirical and historical reality, a reality embodied in not only Cabbalistic literature, but all mystical traditions, from the sacred rituals of Dionysian revelation to the archetypal psychology of Jung. As Borges remarks in the 'Wilkins' essay:

*La imposibilidad de penetrar el esquema divino del universo no puede, sin embargo, disuadirnos de planear esquemas humanos, aunque nos conste que éstos son provisorios.*³⁹²

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 3.4

Expanding expands his analysis from semantic to textual environments, Borges approaches a theory of Generic Incorporation. By counterposing Todorov and Croce, I presage an argument based on the repressiveness of signification that has relevance for Borges, as well as being useful for further critique of Generic Incorporation.

3.4 Pragmatics of the Fantastic

Coming to Genre

Regarding the provisional nature of explanation, Todorov describes the example of a graduate student trying to cartographise a particular genre. Buried under piles of books in his (sic) search he can never be sure of having exhausted the category, of possessing it as an artefact of consciousness. Such a search is, of course, unnecessary. Scientific research relies on the examination of a limited number of cases and the extrapolation of their shared characteristics into a model that is more or less self-consistent. However, as sceptics are fond of pointing out, such a course of action can't guarantee certainty, because,

*[W]hatever the number of phenomena (of literary works, in this case) studied, we are never justified in extrapolating universal laws from them; it is not the quantity of observations, but the logical coherence of a theory that finally matters.*³⁹³

Todorov is interested in problematising the idea of genre as a locatable instance of literary production. Pointing out that each new arrival can be subsumed within its parent - in effect becoming assimilated to and stabilising the genre - he contrasts literary methodology with scientific practice. Such an approach obviously owes much to Thomas Kuhn: novel discoveries tend to modify the previous paradigm, in some cases upsetting it so irrevocably it never recovers. Why shouldn't this also be in the case of literature? Surely we are being too rigid to insist on the notion of genre on logical grounds alone, since each new instance might change by some degree the taxonomy allowing us to see it in the first place. Seeing genre is therefore to hold a provisional approval for a certain structure, while seeing *instances* of genre is to project that structure onto an addition that is seeking a name.³⁹⁴ Genre and instance, or *specimen*, become engaged in a double movement where each changes, and is changed by, the other. The problem for the critic becomes only which movement to examine at a particular time, remaining aware that each direction is legitimate and merely gives a different picture of the exercise of interpretation.

All this is very well, as long as the argument remains at the level of meta-literary description. Of course, a genre is composed of its constituent components, and of course, the addition of components will force a reappraisal of the genre into which these new specimens are earnestly trying to fit. However, what of a generic semiotic collection? What about *language* per se? The name we give to language automatically encompasses all its possibilities because of the categorical sleight of hand we employ: a sign fits into “language” because, *qua* sign, it can't exist anywhere else.³⁹⁵ Todorov allows his argument to ascend from literary depths to semiotic heights when he claims that,

*[A]ny description of a text, by the very fact that it is made by means of words, is a description of genre... There can therefore be no question of “rejecting the notion of genre,” as Croce, for example, called for. Such a rejection would imply the renunciation of language and couldn't, by definition, be formulated.*³⁹⁶

Todorov is right, but let's look at Croce for a minute. Croce's rejection of genre is based on seeing the irreducible character of each work, but we should remember the argument is based on a perceived inability to separate aesthetic and linguistic phenomena. For Croce linguistic problems are really conceptual ones dressed in semiotic guise. Croce uses “aesthetic” to mean conceptual in the weak psychological sense that a creative doctrine of mental associationism requires. Remember how Borges uses it in the same way. The aesthetic/conceptual continuously enlarges its prospect by successive recombination of its existing linguistic resources. As he points out,

*[T]he error (of differentiating the conceptual and the linguistic) has arisen from having failed to grasp the general principle of Aesthetic, known to us: that expressions already produced must descend to the rank of impressions before they can give rise to new impressions. When we utter new words we generally transform the old ones, varying or enlarging their meaning...*³⁹⁷

On Croce's reading of Aesthetic as conceptual transformation, *genre* becomes a captive of description: the impression of genre is incessantly altered by new associations and has to be discarded as an objective term.³⁹⁸ In Todorov's view the act of transformation can

never get off the ground because of the intractably slippery fit of the word “genre” with the phenomenon it is said to describe. Because the linguistic and the aesthetic/conceptual uses of the word “genre” don't coincide, it's impossible to reach a point of entry into the process. Each use plays off the other infecting, and being infected in turn, by the point of view of the user. To overcome this process the assignment of genre becomes arbitrary, and must be viewed provisionally, if it's to be viewed at all. For Todorov,

*‘[I]t is important...to be aware of the degree of abstraction that one assumes, and of the position of this abstraction with regard to any real development; such development will thereby be kept within a system of categories which establish and at the same time depend on it.’*³⁹⁹

This presents no problems at the level of genre: each genre fits, for the purposes of arbitrary description, within a provisional category called literature. However, it presents an obvious problem for language as the master-set of all the semiotic sub-sets comprising it, since it alone can't be reduced to a position of abstraction. Language might exist, if it exists at all, as a totality that can't be viewed from an ‘outside’ since we are always already inside language when we make the attempt. Todorov's ‘degrees of abstraction’ therefore become impossible, since to even pose the problem of language *in language* is to become enmeshed in a game of repercussive signification, a fact of which Derrida, for one and Borges for another, is keenly aware.⁴⁰⁰

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 4.1

Borges sees action in narrative as the ordered sequence of emblematic occurrences. The famous gangster Billy the Kid is explicable not as a real person, but as the bearer of emblematic effects. The reader participates in textual construction through identification with narrative objects. Borges uses the example of the centaur in Morris' verse novel to show how readers are enlisted as participants in narrative through emotional identification. Borges demonstrates how the ordered recurrence of “whiteness” in Poe creates a network of associations emerging as the result of its progressive conceptual assembly. Fantastic narrative relies on breaking the reader's natural objectivity through a startling

revelation for which the author has been cognitively preparing him or her throughout the work. Even though characters in fantastic narrative are never fully identifiable as characters in the round, it is sufficient for their causal effectiveness if they are granted a life-like quality through conceptual condensation. Again, words as conceptual primitives, are seen as crucial for this condensatory act, as they are themselves already condensed packets of meaning. Borges applies this theory to the reception of the film image.

CHAPTER FOUR

Text and World: Symbolic Reproduction in Life and Art

Rejecting psychological causation as a foundation for narrative production, Borges proposes a theory of symbolic reproduction as the basis of artistic experience. The theory is still causal, but psychological factors of interpretation have been replaced by a stricter adherence to cognitively symbolic elements. The basis of this theory is that arbitrary conjunctions of symbols produce, like metaphors, unforeseen new products of the imagination that assume quasi-independent powers of re-association.⁴⁰¹

4.1 *Magic causality*

Borges has made his opposition to the realist novel patently clear. His antagonism stems from what he feels to be an excess of psychological detail detracting from the main business of literature - the concise representation of events serving to transmit meaning. Psychological description, which seeks to uncover the motivation for the events themselves, is clearly superfluous. Worse, psychological descriptions lead to contradictory readings of the novel's characters. This fact, combined with the excess of surface detail necessary in realist literature, create a booming confusion that is the death of the novel.⁴⁰²

While these opinions seem far-fetched (and clearly anti-postmodern), Borges continued throughout his life to defend them. His answer to the problem of the realist novel is the creation of a short narrative where symbolic events are intimated throughout, emerging into full description at the conclusion. This conclusion is, however, left open-ended, thus allowing it to link itself with his other narratives and so continue the process of symbolic recirculation. For Borges, narrative describes the world. There is no ending in narrative, because narrative is connected to a world that is eternal and recirculatory.

4.1.1 Borges, Action Man

Borges' reading has always been considered out of the ordinary. He misses major literary figures like Balzac, Tolstoy and Dickens in his literary articles, preferring to search out a coterie of the neglected. Opinions as to the relative importance of those authors whom he read as a child and teenager, and which have stayed with him as tutelary influences throughout his life, seem to be agreed on this point. William H. Gass, for example, in his essay 'Imaginary Borges' has described Borges' English influences as 'cranky, wayward, even decadent'.⁴⁰³ Borges' most exhaustive explicator in the United States, Gene H. Bell-Villada, has criticised his taste in literature as 'unbalanced', with a predilection for the second-rate.⁴⁰⁴

However, as damning as these criticisms appear to be they do mark out one of Borges' most significant features as a writer: his clear preference for descriptions of action over descriptions of mental states.⁴⁰⁵ The novel of action has the advantage over its realistic, psychologically informed, counterpart in that *things happen*. But they never happen for no good reason. As obvious as this seems, its ramifications for Borges are profound. When things happen they obey the laws of causality. This is not always true of the psychological novel where action appears as the consequence of the interaction of mental events subtly described to make their manifestation all the more startling. As for the explanatory power of these mental events, Borges held they're hardly ever successful, but this is probably due to a penchant for rhetorical exaggerations when dealing with recalcitrant interviewers. Take the following declamation for example:

*I think the psychological novel makes for any amount of make-believe and lying. You can say anything in a psychological novel. So and so was so happy he committed suicide. That may be in a novel, but not in a tale, I should say. In the novel anything is possible. The idea of loving and hating people at the same time. Well, psychoanalysis is a kind of novel. Or gossip.*⁴⁰⁶

Such scathing criticism could be easily discounted in an author of lesser worth and achievements, where it would just seem silly. However, in Borges it poses a serious problem. How could Borges

have held such eccentric opinions and still be received so well by the international artistic community? One solution is to ignore these outbursts as trivial and concentrate on the major works that have garnered him a deservedly wide literary celebrity.⁴⁰⁷ Another, as Pierre Macherey points out, is to attribute them to Borges' famous 'irony' and explain them away as provocative asides.⁴⁰⁸ Yet, another is to critically examine them and try to effect a compromise between his anti-psychologism on the one hand, and his wealth of psychological inference in the *ficciones*.⁴⁰⁹ My approach is to take Borges' objections seriously and extract an anti-psychological, magically causal theory of the novel from his writings.

4.1.2 *The Life of Narrative Objects in Text: Billy the Kid*

Borges had already christened this anti-natural and a-psychological approach by a number of descriptive tags taken from Sir James Frazer's pioneering anthropological survey, *The Golden Bough*. He suggests in turn 'imitative magic', 'homoeopathic magic', and 'contagious magic'.⁴¹⁰ But none of these adequately bring magic causality to light as the main-spring of Borges' literary theory. The causality of narrative need not depend on the internal life of the characters, but merely rely on their symbolic constitution in the text.

For Borges the idea of causation is fundamental to literary theory and the novel. Attracted by the narrative of action from early childhood he imbibed the classic forms of pre-realistic literature and founded his own style on them. His first short narrative, 'Hombres pelearon,' which appeared in the literary magazine to which he contributed in 1927 *Martín Fierro*, and was later included in *El idioma de los argentinos*,⁴¹¹ was a sketch for the more developed 1935 narrative 'Hombre de la esquina rosada,' his first real foray into the short story. A combination of Borges' readings of the gaucho novels of Eduardo Gutiérrez, José Fernández and Domingo Sarmiento's *Facundo*, 'Hombres pelearon' displays the direct story-telling that would be a feature of Borges' most famous narratives. Two men, one representing the North and the other the South, engage in a swift knife-duel where the southerner falls, penetrated and dead. The coda,

*[M]urió sin lástimas. No sirve sino pa juntar moscas, dijo uno que, al final, lo palpó. Murió de pura patria; las guitarras varonas del bajo se alborozaron.*⁴¹²

would serve as a model of ritual bathos in death of Bill Harrigan, aka Billy the Kid, who lies bullet-holed and decomposing in a Tombstone shop window:

*El tercer día lo tuvieron que maquillar. El cuarto día lo enterraron con júbilo.*⁴¹³

In both stories the action of the narrative leads to an inevitable conclusion, which is also a mortal conclusion of the flesh. Fated to die, the “infamous” characters of the Borgesian narrative expire as the culminative act of their tortured existences, and this culmination is marked with a ritual of exculpatory celebration.⁴¹⁴ The life of the Borgesian subject is contingent. The title of the sub-section where Harrigan is slain is titled ‘Muertes porque sí’ to act also as an ironic reminder of the disjunction between the life of the human subject and its textual counterpart. In a work of art the protagonist obeys causal laws and inhabits a world where nothing is fortuitous. In the detective fiction the text is a network of determination where everything is useful as a clue. As it turns out Bill Harrigan’s death has been staring us in the face all along, coded as a series of debts and credits on a ritual balance-sheet: Harrigan ‘owes’ twenty-one murders to the justice of men; this is also his age, the parallelism acting as a forewarning in a classic staple of divine irony, the mystic coincidence of sacred numbers.⁴¹⁵ The first section after the introduction, ‘El estado larval’ hints that the gun-slinger’s career obeys a parallel routine of transformation into a winged object, although not of the angelic variety. The tale shudders with a cacophony of ballistic detonations reminiscent of fire-crackers on a national holiday, usually prompted by their counterparts in the exuberant dust of revolution or independence; on killing a Mexican named Villagrán (a name that can be translated as the Big House, or Mansion, an ironic reference to the last abode the murderer is destined not to attain); Billy ostentatiously *sleeps* with the corpse in a parody of the *vigilia de los muertos*, etc. Everything in the story adds up to the death of the protagonist. Everything is obedient to the magic formula of ontological irony the astute reader must painstakingly decode.

Borges’ position on the revelatory task of narrative derives from the belief that poetry is a process of discovery, rather than solely one of

construction. Attacking the neo-classical Parnassians, Mallarmé champions a revelatory ethic allowing poetic meaning to emerge, as if by sleight of hand, from the page with the minimum of manipulation. Where this ethic applies to poetry one has simply to allow the purity of human emotion to be described and the sense of the work is established: «...il y a symbole, il y a création, et le mot poésie a ici son sens »⁴¹⁶

4.1.3 Enlisting the Reader in Narrative Construction

Borges applies his reading of Symbolism to the novel in 'Narrative Art and Magic' chiefly through an examination of three works, William Morris' *The Life and Death of Jason*, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and Chapter Forty Two of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, 'The Whiteness of the Whale'. He demonstrates how we suspend disbelief through the continuous unravelling of story line. For Borges, the main task of literature when dealing with fantastic subjects is to enlist our participation in the text.⁴¹⁷ This is achieved by making the events of the piece as apprehensible as possible, a feature missing in the modern novel of psychic events:

*El análisis de los procedimientos de la novela ha conocido escasa publicidad. La causa histórica de esta continuada reserva es la prioridad de otros géneros; la causa fundamental, la casi inextricable complejidad de los artificios novelescos, que es el laborioso desprender de la trama.*⁴¹⁸

Discounting Borges' lack of critical elaboration, and his insistence on the priority of other genres as a debilitating effect on study of the novel, his objections are aimed at the continuously evolving narrative of character description in the psychologically based novel. In such works, which seek to mirror the perversity of human character, complexity and contradiction are inevitable. Part of the problem for Borges is structural and part intellectual. The novel goes on too long for his liking, and this allows too much room for absurd motivational conjecture. (Remember his criticism of incoherencies in the psychological novel where the author can say anything and get away with it.) The dramatic succession of events in a tale is attenuated by

the sheer effort of filling three or four hundred pages. Borges' other objection is based on the idea of climactic narrative punctuation shaking us out of our complacency and forcing us to participate in the action as if we were experiencing real events. Borges considers the difficulties of Morris' verse novel in terms of facilitating the reader's entry into the art work:

*El arduo proyecto de Morris era la narración verosímil de las aventuras fabulosas de Jáson, rey of Iolcos. La sorpresa lineal, recurso general de la lírica, no era posible en esa relación de más de diez mil versos. Esta necesitaba ante todo una fuerte apariencia de veracidad, capaz de producir esa espontánea suspensión de la duda, que constituye, para Coleridge, la fe poética.*⁴¹⁹

Of course, it would be impossible to produce a convincing «sorpresa lineal» or lineal climax in such a long work. If we're to be convinced that what we are reading is happening to us, we can't be expected to wade through ten thousand lines to the conclusion. Borges introduces Coleridge's idea of poetic faith to secure our passive involvement in the text. Our contract with the text is maintained through the strategy of intermittent references to the main characters who await narrative justification in the reader's mind.

4.1.4 The Centaur as Narrative Object

According to the story Aeson, Jason's father, entrusts the upbringing of his son to the centaur Chiron. Obviously such a figure is fantastic and frankly unbelievable. How then is our trust to be gained in such an improbable incident? Borges explains that, from a previous trivial mention of the race of Centaurs in a lyrical description of the forest of Mount Pelion, Morris introduces the idea that such creatures actually exist in company with ordinary beasts such as wolves and bears. Since we know about wolves and bears we will be able to accept the idea of the centaur who is routinely associated with them more readily. However, to secure our faith more fully Morris creates the figure of the slave whom is charged with delivering the young Jason to the centaur's forest lair. The king loads the poor man with a series of precautions, filling his mind with a dreadful image of the centaur, but then unexpectedly 'recommending' to him that he show no fear before the frightful beast! Burdened with this impossible precaution it is inevitable the slave should fall to his knees trembling before the

appearance of Chiron. The job of veracity is done in that instant of terror that we share with the slave and wherein poetic faith is achieved. Borges adds with satisfaction,

*[A]notemos, de paso, que Morris puede no comunicar al lector su imagen del centauro ni siquiera invitarnos a tener una, le basta con nuestra continua fe en sus palabras, como en el mundo real.*⁴²⁰

Here belief in described reality has been achieved through a series of images constructed in words. It appears obvious that narrative is carried out through such simple means, but this is precisely Borges' point. It's the *images* that matter, not so much the descriptions of mental events filling out the psychological novel. Get the images right, he seems to be saying, and the story will unfold automatically. The job of the text is to persuade us of the reality of these events.

Borges' exploration of persuasion continues in a discussion of Morris' description of the Sirens' song in Book Fourteen. Medea, Jason's consort, is now on the Argo with her fateful prince, and she alone knows the dangers of these Nereid maids. Borges explains the reader is lulled into a false sense of security by Morris' description of the tranquillity of their passage. Medea has attempted to warn the sailors, but they took no heed. Our complicity is once more gained in the person of the unhappy Medea, with whom a sympathetic bond is forged through our knowledge of her desperate infatuation for Jason. Herself caught up by forces of desire she can't control, she vainly urges caution within the orbit of yet another more deadly seduction - that of the Sirens who lure sailors to shipwreck and drowning. However, Morris has strengthened the bond between reader and read with one more strand, that of the sailors' complicity in their own destruction. As they catch the first strains of the Sirens' melody Medea looks at them pityingly:

*And by their faces could the queen behold
How sweet it was, although no tale was told,
To those worn toilers o'er the bitter sea*⁴²¹

She fears for them, yet understands them. Will her own love be less destructive for Jason than that of the Nereids for his crew? However, Morris keeps the Sirens at a little poetic distance to increase their

allure. By maintaining a gap between anticipation and the action he creates a direct analogue to the earlier scene where the slave trembled before the undefinable centaur:

*...for they were near enow
To see the gust of evening blow
Long locks of hair across those bodies white
With golden spray hiding some dear delight.*⁴²²

Borges comments on the play of sexual imagery in these 'bodies white' which serves to heighten their attraction: «el rocío de oro» hides some delight, but is this agitation of the foam caused by the water, or by their «violentos rizos», presumably pubic in origin? It looks as though the Argonauts are going to be ensnared by the sea-women. That is, until Jason prays to Orpheus, Hades' minstrel god, who comes to their aid by providing a counter-distraction for the crew in his own music. In a conclusion to this episode participating in Morris' own bathetic imagery of the forestalling of sexual climax, Borges goes on to describe in rather matter of fact language how the Sirens make fruitless promises to the sailors of safe-haven, how the sailors are aided by the «canto correctivo» of Orpheus,⁴²³ how the sailors keep going and are assisted out of danger by the further corrective of one of their number, «un alto ateniense» who cracks under the strain and leaps overboard, swimming for shore, madness and death.

4.1.5 The Importance of Ordered Recurrence: Whiteness in Poe

What attracts Borges so strongly to this particular piece of high Victorian versification? Although Morris' poem is attractive in its own right, this quality alone can't account for such a weighty series of pronouncements as to its symbolic value. In the passage where Borges deals with imagic strategy one is drawn to the poet's peculiar insistence that whenever the Sirens be portrayed they should be so described in terms of *whiteness*. One recalls Borges' own mentions of *those bodies white*, but the figure occurs insistently throughout the Fourteenth chapter. The Sirens bodies are 'fair beyond man's thought,' as they sing their deadly song the spray-shower flies 'o'er their white limbs,' they sing of their own 'white arms' and 'pearly limbs' in attempting to captivate the sailors, but Orpheus responds warning of 'their bodies fair and white'.⁴²⁴ What we don't know is that Borges is

preparing us for the idea that it is the *ordered recurrence* of an image that determines a work of art's effectiveness. Under the circumstances his second example is perfectly understandable. In order to fix the idea of symbolic reproduction as the main strategy of magic causality he fastens on one of Poe's long tales, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.⁴²⁵

Borges read Poe as a youth and was, as we've found, intrigued by the Symbolists' theory of autonomous poetic creation. Borges, in his essay on narrative art and magic, likewise criticises expository psychologism, but this time from the further conviction that it's altogether impossible to accurately render the psyche via intellectual description. One might rely, at the level of description, for the managed play of images leading to an inescapable conclusion (not the *natural* one coming about by 'the incessant result of uncontrollable and infinite operations')⁴²⁶, and this conclusion will be the governing metaphor for the work of art against which every event and action will be seen to take place, as if by the laws of determinism. This symbolic, or 'magical' causality is allowed to emerge through the lucidly placed details foreshadowing an ineluctable conclusion.

Having strengthened this link to Mallarmé, Borges reinvests the nebulous symbolisation of *whiteness* in Morris's novel with a discussion of Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. The tale concerns the adventures of the Yankee narrator, shipwrecked in the South Seas after many hazards on board, and attended by the most outrageous adventures among the natives there, and later in the Antarctic, before being eventually rescued. Borges carries out a programme of anti-discovery to uncover «el secreto argumento» of the novela. His plan of operation is obliquely inferential and predicated on the psychology of repression. To find out what Poe is hiding he goes to the episode in Chapter Eighteen where Pym describes the wondrous coloured streams on the antarctic island where the survivors of the wreck are met by natives in canoes - despite being at latitude 83 ° 20' and longitude 43° 5' W. which places them on the Antarctic shelf 6000 kilometres directly south of the Malagasy Republic. These streams are composed of veins of purplish liquid described at length and are completely impossible. And that is the point: only the completely impossible can serve to continue the action of a fantastic tale. The Antarctic is *white*, its symbolic signature

is the antithesis of colour. What would be more completely out of place than these opalescent liquors? Borges mentions Melville's mystical description of the white whale in order to emphasise the point: nothing would be more out of the ordinary and fascinating than a sea-monster rising from the inky depths wearing a snowy mantle.

4.1.6 Shock Effect in Fantastic Narrative

Unlike the character novel, which relies on subterranean emotions of a quite probable nature, continuous shocks sustain fantastic narrative, keeping our attention. To heighten their unreality, and to participate in his own theory, Borges translates the entire episode for his Spanish-speaking audience where they're described, inserting it into his exposition where it sits jarringly to confound the smooth process of reading. He explains,

*[R]ectamente se induce de lo anterior que el problema central de la novelística es la causalidad. Una de las variedades del género, la morosa novela de caracteres, finge o dispone una concatenación de motivos que se proponen no diferir de los del mundo real.*⁴²⁷

Borges' criticism is based on his counter-claim the fantastic tale is a superior species of narrative.⁴²⁸ Unlike novels of psychological import that can't hope to capture the contrary richness of emotional life, the fantastic tale makes no pretence at believability. Its effects are all surface structure, which is where they should be if symbolic reproduction is to take place. Borges extends his theory of magic causality to the fantastic in general:

*En la novela de continuas vicisitudes, esa motivación es improcedente, y lo mismo en el relato de breves páginas y en la infinita novela espectacular que compone Hollywood con los plateados ídola de Joan Crawford y que las ciudades releen. Un orden muy diverso los rige, lúcido y atávico. La primitiva claridad de la magia.*⁴²⁹

One might think the author has made his point clearly enough for the ears of the listener: the fantastic attracts our attention, the attendant horror of its description causes us to suspend disbelief, participating in the text as if by an irresistible attractant.⁴³⁰ We are frankly shocked into belief. Such a theory is at least old as Coleridge, older in fact,

staring out at us from the animated shadows of Neolithic cave paintings.⁴³¹ Clearly Borges needs something to extend his argument for the power of magic causality and elevate it beyond the position of the conjurer's materialising rabbits and exploding bouquets. It's at this point Borges introduces the strategy of sympathetic transference into magic causality, although he doesn't actually name it as such. In order to make the awesome horror of the fantastic tale more potent the author can't rely on a succession of unrelated events, no matter how extraordinary. The reader, used to finding one marvel after another, gets bored. In order to enlist our continued participation the story runs at two distinct levels: the surface narrative of continuous marvels, and the oblique series of transferred effects operating beneath the surface. To keep us occupied there must be a recourse to the primal magic of the displaced correspondence between things in the real world and things in the magical one. Invoking Frazer's *Golden Bough* Borges continues,

*[E]se procedimiento o ambición de los antiguos hombres ha sido sujetado por Frazer a una conveniente ley general, la de la simpatía, que postula un vínculo inevitable entre cosas distantes, ya porque su figura es igual - magia imitativa, homeopática - ya por el hecho de una cercanía anterior - magia contagiosa.*⁴³²

Borges illustrates his case with certain examples of both types of magic, imitative and contagious. Although these are of dubious authenticity, they nonetheless contribute colourfully to his argument. The unguent of Kenelm Digby that is applied not to the wound, but to the implement inflicting it, is cited as an example of contagious magic.⁴³³ Obviously the curative effect travels supernaturally from the immediate cause to its effects. Imitative magic works by a homoeopathic pathway: one takes an element of the desired effect and ritualises it to draw its real counterpart within a practical orbit where it can be managed more effectively. The 'red skins of Nebraska' are recounted as dressing the stretched hide of a bison with its horns and mane and taking part in a 'frenzied dance day and night' to induce more of the hapless beasts to come to their spears. The law-men of central Australia are supposed to cut their forearms so the sky will rain its own "blood". Malays are reported to practise torments on a wax doll so the person it represents will suffer similar painful inconveniences. Sterile women of Sumatra attempt to suckle

wooden homunculi to induce fertility.⁴³⁴ For Borges, who espouses traditional ethnocentric prejudices to enlarge his argument, in primitive peoples there can be no directly ascertainable link between action at a distance, either in time or space, and its effects. The distance is simply too large, the time elapsed too long, to allow a causal link to be made in the mind of the observer. (Borges would use this distancing effect in 'Averroës Search' where Abulkasim's journey to China is rejected by his audience who cannot conceive of a link over so great a distance.) So too in the novel, and incidentally, in its forbear the historical epic; «esa peligrosa armonía, esa frenética y precisa causalidad» might be communicated in terms of an unevenly collapsed universe where events of a similar nature can be described one after the other, regardless of the time elapsed or the impossible distances between them.⁴³⁵ The fantastic novel of events

*...debe ser un juego preciso de vigilancias, ecos y afinidades. Todo episodio, en un cuidadoso relato, es de proyección ulterior.*⁴³⁶

4.1.7 Narrative Condensation in Borgesian Poetics

This is the key to a Borgesian poetics. A well-constructed plot must contain elements that are named, disappear, and reappear to trouble us. The fantastic tale is first made believable by an incident where we are confronted by a powerful image given authority by the emotional appeal of preparatory incidents: the bond of sympathy established between the reader and the trembling slave, and the fruitless warning of tragic Medea. The image then maintains its potency by regular narrative condensations, the image being re-vivified in our imagination. Frazerian homoeopaths applied in a theory of poetics. However, the theory so far only carries out a series of operations which serve to further the text as a participatory and magic act. Tales have beginnings, middles and endings and the job of Aristotelian catharsis might still be done. But because this is a theory of *magic causality* the identification by the spectator or reader with the action of the drama is forestalled by the level of abstraction at which symbolic reproduction takes place. Unlike the novel of psychological effects, in which there is no clear dividing line between the character's thoughts and our own, the fantastic drama is always informed by its unreality. Medea and Jason, Captain Ahab and Moby Dick, are symbolisations of actions having emotional content, but they're also embodiments of impersonal forces beyond the reach of the mortal observer. Because

of this one never really *becomes* the characters in fantastic drama - they remain unconfined by identifiable human experience, and as such function as ciphers rather than characters in the round.

This can, however, be an advantage. The drawback with the psychologically observed character is that we must impose “normal” standards of human behaviour on them through our act of identification. Because they have been thus “normalised” to human standards of civility their actions are seen in terms of potential moral value.⁴³⁷ They have partaken of the fruit of knowledge and are expected to exercise moral responsibility if they're ‘good,’ or transgress the absolutes of virtue if ‘bad’. The advantage of such willing censure is that our expectations for ourselves are performed through the actions of the fictional character. And as for the conclusion of the tale? In the dilatory novel of character, to use Borges’ phrase, the action must be at an end when the bad have died unhappily and the good are seen to prosper. The end of the tale is thus the act of textual closure. How will we *believe* in characters that rise from the dead, or re-emerge unrecognisably sporting a moral make-over? The Borgesian character, on the other hand, who never departs fully from the symbolic plane, is not so afflicted by such burdens of worthiness, and maintains a cheerful textual interchangeability.⁴³⁸

To illustrate the flexibility of the character in the magic narrative where it represents ‘the projection of some previous episode’ Borges turns to one of his most cherished influences:

*Así, en una de las fantasmagorías de Chesterton, un desconocido acomete a un desconocido para que lo embista un camión, y esa violencia necesaria, pero alarmante, prefigura su acto final de declararlo insano para que no lo puedan ejecutar por un crimen.*⁴³⁹

This is the antithesis of Aristotelianism. The outrageous crime is contingent and without symbolic importance, beyond the requirements of the main character’s motivation to escape execution. Unlike the murder of his unknown father by Oedipus at the cross-roads, the consequences of the villain’s act in Chesterton aren’t imbued with symbolic value outside the limited orbit of the crime: any victim does equally well. Because of the inherent contingency of the events we

are distanced from the character by the horror of the act, and the lack of psychological portraiture beyond the simple strategy of means, motive, opportunity and a rather untragic urge for self-preservation. We don't, unless we are sociopaths, identify with either victim or villain, and the conclusion can't affect our moral judgements beyond the banalities of judging action good or bad.⁴⁴⁰

4.1.8 Words, Words, Words

Borges follows this example of homoeopathic magic (the victim is sacrificed to ensure the safety of the villain; therefore the murder is substitutive) with another where ritual incantation is used to dupe the victim:

En otra, una peligrosa y vasta conspiración integrada por un solo hombre (con socorro de barbas, de caretas y de seudónimos) es anunciada con tenebrosa exactitud en el dístico:

*As all stars shrivel in the single sun,
The words are many, but The Word is one*

que viene a descifrarse después, con permutación de mayúsculas:

*The words are many, but the word is One.*⁴⁴¹

The conspiracy hinges on the ambiguity between the word and the number it represents, but there is no opportunity for us to participate in the action above the level of interested spectator. Our activity is directed to the metatext of the puzzle.⁴⁴² Because of this the characters are dispensable, serving only to hinge the action between the folds of narrative making up the content of the tale.⁴⁴³ Having grasped the fact of substitution of a number for a word we're free to apply the trick to other experiences, while forgetting the particulars of the individual story. The substitutive act that the story embodies can therefore be considered open-ended, and interminably applicable, and the story likewise. We are free to make the declaration so often heard by devotees of crime fiction, reading of an especially noteworthy murder they seem to recognise, that it was "just like" *The Horrendous Happenstance of the Hirsute Herring*, or some other work with an equally improbable title.

The symbolic elements of narrative can also be reversed without loss of effect. In a discussion of Estanislao del Campo's *Fausto*, an Argentine reading of Goethe's epic transplanted to the gaucho South, Borges describes the winged knife of an Indian assailant, mentioned in the opening stanza, as a contradiction of the mistaken arrow that kills the Chestertonian hero's best friend standing in a tower at the end of the tale.⁴⁴⁴ What matters is the images should do their task of symbolic transference. What Borges calls the «teleología de palabras y de episodios» functions autonomously of other textual effects.⁴⁴⁵

4.1.9 Filmic Condensation as an Analogue to Narrative Condensation
Borges later invokes the filmic narrative in support of the theory, natural under the circumstances. Film can portray symbol in visual terms guaranteeing a more immediate impact on the audience. This imagic expenditure is confined to an hour and a half so the delays experienced between the opening scene where the plot is divulged might be managed in a continuously entertaining way. The best films don't drag out the action but complete it in a parallel satisfaction of their symbolic and syntagmatic structures.⁴⁴⁶ In *A cartas vistas* (*The Showdown*) adventurers gamble for the possession of a prostitute. By the end of the game one of the gamblers, who is secretly in love with the woman (his desire communicated to the audience by a gestural vocabulary founded on the knowing glance) has gained his object without disclosing his desire. Sternberg's *La ley del hampa* (*Underworld*, 1927)⁴⁴⁷ introduces itself with a shooting in an alley, a premonition of the hail of gunfire will forming the climax. *Fatalidad* (*Dishonoured*)⁴⁴⁸ peppers the narrative with a menagerie of symbolic recurrences: kisses, cats, grapes and a piano reappear to progressively signal the main theme of betrayal.

No one can doubt the importance of this key essay in the evolution of Borges' major *ficciones*. *Four Faultless Felons* by G. K. Chesterton is obviously an influence on 'The Garden of Forking Paths' where an expeditious murder announces the secret invasion of the Allies in the First World War, just as the word-game of 'The Loyal Traitor'⁴⁴⁹ patently prefigures the cabbalistic subterfuge of the aptronymic Red Scharlach in 'Death and the Compass',⁴⁵⁰ while the tale of the Indian's careless knife is echoed in a number of tales, including the murder in Borges' first real short narrative 'Streetcorner Man'.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 4.2

Magic causality is not merely a formalistic device, relying on delay and ordered recurrence of symbolic effects, it must be understood as a systematic manipulation of the reader's narrative expectations. Borges uses the gaucho as an emblematic figure to demonstrate how he as narrative object embodies a range of cognitive expectations with which the reader is virtually coerced to accept through participation in the text. But the gaucho must also be the bearer of a transhistorical subjectivity if the art work is to achieve any lasting fame. We return to Borges' contradictory Ultraist history to draw-out the metaphoric mechanisms upon which Borgesian poetics is built. By rejecting its innovatory aspect and concentrating on the reinvigoration of ordinary language, Borges creates a new awareness of the hidden signification of the metaphor as atomic narrative, a phenomenon shown most clearly in Borges' investigation of the Icelandic kenning. Borges discovers that the kenning's functional dissonance mirrors the shock effect of the fantastic narrative, enlisting the reader's participation in the production of meaning: this is the kenning's magic causality. metaphors rely on the transposition of elemental associations for their effectiveness, and as such they are analogous to the progressive accumulation of fictive elements in narrative to produce the startling epiphany that secures our symbolic identification with textual characters.

4.2 *The Production of Symbol*

Borges' theory of magic causality is a combination of mythic reproduction, the manipulation of desire, and pragmatic reception ethics.⁴⁵¹ Grounded in the conviction the work of art is primarily dialectic rather than mimetic, the 'magic' quality of causation rests on a subtle game of collaborative reading between author and audience.⁴⁵² The work of art creates a world where we are expected to knowingly participate in the reproduction of symbolic effects through Frazerian homoeopathy. The contagion of meanings acts to suspend disbelief - we fall into a state of poetic faith. What Borges calls «un orbe autónomo de corroboraciones» is effected by the continual play and interplay of key images and symbols.⁴⁵³

4.2.1 *The Private Life of Magic causality*

However, Borges' theory of magic causality is much more subtle than this rather simplistic exegesis would suggest. Eccentric and private, magic causality departs from the formalistic literary theory of the period in important ways. (Nor can it be claimed as either a predecessor of, or rival to, its Russian namesake.)⁴⁵⁴ W. B. Yeats' theory of direct symbolic apprehension is undercut by Borges' insistence on delay as a critical factor in managing desire. The symbolic reproductions that Yeats called 'the playthings of the allegorist or pedant'⁴⁵⁵ are crucial for the Borgesian project: his work can't be conceived without it. Borges' insistence on the importance of the classical model for symbolic reproduction is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot.⁴⁵⁶ Borges selects examples within his own experience for exposition, and so José Hernández' epic poem *El gaucho Martín Fierro* becomes the store-house of symbol for Argentine literature, a store-house that depends in its turn on previous incarnations of the gaucho myth, beginning with the Uruguyan poets Juan Cruz Varela, Francisco Acuña de Figueroa and Bartolomé Hidalgo, and continuing through Lugones, Ascasubi and Lussich.⁴⁵⁷

One need not have an extensive knowledge of Argentine literature to follow Borges' ideas.⁴⁵⁸ Indeed, a little cultural myopia is even desirable for his theory, enabling it to be applied beyond the scope of the essays in which it's formulated. Borges works toward his object from multiple departure points, any one of which might provide new

lines of flight. As he explains in the opening paragraph of 'La poesía gauchesca,'

*[E]s fama que le preguntaron a Whistler cuánto tiempo había requerido para pintar uno de sus Nocturnos y que respondió: "Toda mi vida." Con igual rigor pudo haber dicho que había requerido todos los siglos que procedieron al momento en que lo pintó. De esa correcta aplicación de la ley de causalidad se sigue que el menor de los hechos presupone el inconcebible universo e, inversamente, que el universo necesita del menor de los hechos. Investigar las causas de un fenómeno, siquiera de un fenómeno tan simple como la literatura gauchesca, es proceder en infinito; básteme la mención de dos causas que juzgo principales.*⁴⁵⁹

It's obvious Borges is embarking on a systematic programme of critical explication. If his progress is uneven at times and doubles back this is not to be wondered at. Indeed, the recapitulations are a necessary part of the programme and spring from the principle of interconnection and necessary dependence embodied in the statement about the universe being the sum of the acts, no matter how trivial, composing it.

In such a universe nothing can occur without influencing first its immediate environment, and then spreading out to influence the whole of creation. Astoundingly, nor can it *have come into existence* except as the result of the forces that have been working to bring it to light. For Borges the idea of a causal relation is employed as one in which a strong degree of similarity can be detected between historical events. Change is necessary, but the identity of the critical defining features is assumed. Thus, the theory of historical influence is dialectical, but does not strictly rely on the location of *antithetical* phenomena, since, strictly, the law of causality forbids it. An antithetical theory of historical change is predicated on direct reactions between historical events. Since the events in such a reactionary programme would be radically different they'd be necessarily unrecognisable, and thus untraceable to an evolutionary well-spring. Borges' dialectic is *progressive* and symbolically homogeneous.⁴⁶⁰

4.2.2 *The Gaucho and Symbolic Identification in Borges*

At the same time Borges' theory of symbolic reproduction denies the obviousness of causality as directly and unswervingly evolutionary. If the world is implicated in the facts that go to constitute it, and these facts are in turn implicated in other facts, then the notion of direct lines of symbolic communication becomes untenable. Thus, while being progressive Borges' dialectic is also *synthetic* in the broad sense. On this basis he rejects the idea of looking back to the *gaucho* as the single forbear of the literature that enshrines him.⁴⁶¹ Indeed, such efforts can only deform what they set out to identify. The gaucho, incidentally in the same way as the Australian *bushman*, is the creation of the interplay of a historical phenomenon, a poetry and an urban mythology:

*Derivar la literatura gauchesca de su materia, el gaucho, es una confusión que desfigura la notoria verdad. No menos necesario para la formación de ese género que la pampa y que las cuchillas fue el carácter urbano de Buenos Aires y de Montevideo.*⁴⁶²

How then is one to understand the gaucho as such and lift him off the background of his literary creation? The description of the gaucho as *symbol* obviously relies on the literature that spawned him. Attempting a historical extraction is therefore doomed to failure. At the same time one can't deny the actual basis for the literary creation: the gaucho did exist as historical fact. To resolve the contradiction between the real and symbolic gaucho Borges acknowledges the necessary role of the author in the creation of myth. Authors create symbols that outlive them, and they outlive their authors by being so variously defined, but so universal in quality, they can effect an ideal affinity with successive literatures:

*Tales definiciones, claro está, son mera curiosidades de la inventiva; su débil y remota justificación es que todo gaucho de la literatura (todo personaje de la literatura) es, de alguna manera, el literato que lo ideó. Se ha repetido que los héroes de Shakespeare son independientes de Shakespeare; para Bernard Shaw, sin embargo, "Macbeth es la tragedia del hombre de letras moderno, como asesino y cliente de brujas"...Sobre la mayor o menor autenticidad de los gauchos escritos, cabe observar, tal vez, que para casi todos nosotros, el gaucho es un objeto ideal, prototípico.*⁴⁶³

Notwithstanding Bernard Shaw's sarcastic swipe at the critics, Borges' theory of symbolic reproduction rests on the principle of universality in turn supported by magic causality's sympathetic dimension.⁴⁶⁴ However, the sympathetic likeness is not to be understood in terms of a generalised similarity. The *generic* gaucho exists as a representation of a literature historically linked to its interpretation by successive critiques, but is always available as a symbol to which a contemporary interpretation can be appended. This interpretation will always be tokenistic where it relies solely on a traditional reading. (Is 'the bushman' as a type more or less realistic when read without the individualising collateral of A. B. Paterson's 'Mulga Bill'?) Borges is opposed to the template theory of symbolic reproduction. The more *individual* the fictional character is, (i.e. the greater the number of collateral interpretations, such as ballads, epic verse, hortatory narratives, etc. that is appended), the *less* amenable the fictional character is to a conventional reading:

*El arte, siempre, opta por lo individual, lo concreto; el arte no es platónico.*⁴⁶⁵

This seems like a paradox, but it's consistent with a view of the existence of characters in fiction as the individual embodiments of a definite repertoire of recurrent attributes. This repertoire constitutes their symbolic existence, but does not over-ride their personal qualities. These remain the province of biography: fictional characters have a wealth of biographical detail without which they'd remain flat and two-dimensional - perfect fodder for the conventionalist.

Apart from the personal biography of a character, what other factors can account for the success or failure of a text to achieve its ideal life as a great work of art? Borges has already isolated two contradictory effects: universalising the character through the genre (a flattening diffusion) and particularising the character to an absurd degree in an attempt to bestow individuality (literary overdetermination).⁴⁶⁶ Borges acknowledges both effects as likely to produce a sterility in the work because they tend to obscure the original causal obligations of the text. The work of art may not be Platonic, but neither is it wholly individual.⁴⁶⁷ The work of art is an aspect of the play between the real historical world and its literary counterpart. As such critique that fails

to locate it in both areas of human experience simultaneously tends to either fragment it through chronological exegetics, or falsely unify it by the artificial production of myth.⁴⁶⁸ The work of art stands at the mid-point between history and story, mediating the experience of these two worlds,

*[T]an dilatado y tan incalculable es el arte, tan secreto su juego.*⁴⁶⁹

How is this mid-point of experience to be communicated to its audience? Following Borges' logic of pragmatic reception, the characters in the work might function as oblique markers of shared experience. In other words, just as with the manipulations by which William Morris effected an emotional bond between reader and read, the gaucho might operate almost as if he were almost not there. To make the experience of narrated reality too explicit by putting the whole experience into a character who is always resorting to self-conscious "gaucho" gestures only serves to distance us from that experience. *Martín Fierro* is a poem to be appreciated in the pampa as well as in La Boca.⁴⁷⁰ Hernández resolves the contradictions of making the gaucho narrative into consumable idealisation not by resorting to florid description or histrionics, but by the presentation of the gaucho's experience in a direct form, one that satisfies Borges' programme for magic causality:

*¿Qué fin se proponía Hernández? Uno, limitadísimo: la historia del destino de Martín Fierro, referida por éste. No intuimos los hechos, sino al paisano Martín Fierro contándolos. De ahí que la omisión, o la atenuación del color local sea típica de Hernández.*⁴⁷¹

One might think a gaucho poem that doesn't specify 'day or night, [or even] the markings of horses'⁴⁷² wouldn't satisfy our expectations, but it is just this limitation that allows our act of poetic faith to become better established:

*No silencia la realidad, pero sólo se refiere a ella en función del carácter del héroe.*⁴⁷³

This phrase 'a function of the hero's character' is crucial for Borges' poetics. Just as Medea in Morris' *The Life and Death of Jason* attempts to warn the argonauts, but is unsuccessful, she establishes

her motivational credentials. She is a person who *would* act nobly and successfully in other circumstances, therefore her character is definable in terms of her potential for admirable action. She *functions* as the marker of noble action, even if her warning is doomed to be unheard. Martín Fierro too is the embodiment of the tragic impulse and reflection. The heroic deserter gaucho who will be killed so ingloriously by a stranger in a bar-fight contemplates what his life has become in incredulity:

*No me faltaba una guasca;
Esa ocasión eché el resto:
Bozal, bolas y manea.
¡El que hoy tan pobre me vea
Tal vez no creerá todo esto!*⁴⁷⁴

Borges elaborates on the importance of dramatic reflection as a means of eliciting our participation in an essay delivered as a paper to Buenos Aires' Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, 'El escritor argentino y la tradición' but this time from the point of determining what importance specialised vocabulary has in the production of authentic literature. Although the verse quoted from *Martín Fierro* incorporates unavoidable criollisms («guasca», «manea») its theme of tragic regret transcends localised language.⁴⁷⁵ Discussing the relative unimportance of colourful touches of local dialect Borges notes that towards the end of the second book in the verbal dual between Martín Fierro and the Negro who will kill him, Hernández forgets to include the sparse criollisms even he can't dispense with utterly, and the protagonists end up in an existential exchange closer to the real concerns of two men who may be sometime in the future locked in mortal combat. Borges says Hernández,

*...olvida esta preocupación de color local y escribe en un español general, y no habla de temas vernáculos, sino de grandes temas abstractos, del tiempo, del espacio, del mar, de la noche... Cuando esos dos gauchos, Fierro y el Moreno, se ponen a cantar, olvidan toda afectación gauchesca y abordan temas filosóficos.*⁴⁷⁶

To corroborate the transcendence of the content of the text over its form he relates his experience on the northern border of Uruguay

where authentic gauchos existed until the 1930s, as yet unburdened by the obligation of acting picturesquely:

*He podido comprobar lo mismo oyendo a payadores de las orillas; éstos rehuyen el versificar en orillero o lunfardo y tratan de expresarse con corrección.*⁴⁷⁷

4.2.3 A Return to Transhistorical Subjects

Borges concludes that when it comes time to speak of important matters, of life and death, love and hate, the ephemera of dialect always make way for the essential symbolisations of language.⁴⁷⁸ This has important ramifications for his reflections on the depiction of character in literature. Just as the real payadores he'd overheard struggled to free themselves of a literary convention in order to communicate matters of importance, and Hernández' protagonists become philosophers in a bar-room when the eye of poetry is off them, other literary characters function not so much as the signals of style, but as the vehicles of transcendent reflection. As such they're always beyond the creative grip of their authors and assume their own lives in the public imagination. Borges mentions the example of Kipling who in his political propaganda devoted himself to British chauvinism, but ended up being remembered for his children's books. Swift, seeking to condemn humanity through the satire of *Gulliver's Travels* only sparks the interest of English literature departments as a social critic. The work of art is beyond its creator if it's great. However, to be great it must transmit universal ideas embodied by particular characters. Paradoxically, the work of art is fixed between two worlds: that of the orthodoxy of its genre and the reflective individuality of its characters. Martín Fierro succeeds because he forgets he is an Argentine and turns his vision inward. The audience too forgets the gaucho's nationality and falls into a state of poetic faith where they identify utterly with the work at hand. On the other hand, from the point of view of the artist great literature is produced by the same process: one lets go of stylistics to embrace transcendent values. A universal literature is produced by an act of particular renunciation:

*Creo que si nos abandonamos a ese sueño voluntario, que se llama la creación artística, seremos argentinos y seremos, también, buenos o tolerables escritores.*⁴⁷⁹

On the surface this seems to be pure T. S. Eliot: 'The second-rate artist, of course, cannot afford to surrender himself to any common action; for his chief task is the assertion of all the trifling differences which are his distinction...' ⁴⁸⁰ The Argentine authors Borges censures for affectation have fallen into the trap of excessive individualising, but they have fallen in at the level of the character's *self-subjectivity*, of mistaking form for function. ⁴⁸¹ The protagonists of universal drama (Borges is working towards the idea of Universal History), while they reflect on themselves as characters in literature, can never emerge from the genre that holds them fast and infect other forms. That is, they can never avail themselves of the collateral resources surrounding them. ⁴⁸² Don Quijote could never gallop off into songs, verse, the movies, etc. if he were completely absorbed in the question of what it means to be a paranoid schizophrenic in seventeenth century Spain. If Don Quijote, and Martín Fierro for that matter, gallop right off the page at times it's because they allow us to identify with them more fully than other characters in literature. The same process holds for writers who are, while they write, also the readers of their own creation suspended between life and the page. In T. S. Eliot's words, '...only the man who has so much to give that he can forget himself in his work can afford to collaborate, to exchange, contribute.' ⁴⁸³

Although Eliot is describing the organic whole of artistic creativity in terms of a reliance on the classics, his idea of the importance of cultural resources rings true with Borges' theory of creative transference. Both reader and writer give themselves to the dream in which the conditions of nationality and cultural self-consciousness are abandoned. They *collaborate* in the description of unique human reflections, *exchange* these reflections and *contribute* to the production of universal literature. This universal literature, of course, transcends genre. Borges rejects the notion of genre beyond the technical description of its necessary components, finding the term unhelpful for an investigation of transcendent forms of literature. *El gaucho Martín Fierro* can't be bound by conventions of nomenclature. Epic literature, to which Hernández' work nominally belongs, and its prosodic off-spring, the novel, can only be mutually assimilated by an act of historical supposition. Coincidences don't necessarily make necessities:

*Se me recordará que las epopeyas antiguas representan una performa de la novela. De acuerdo, pero asimilar el libro de Hernández a esa categoría primitiva es agotarse inútilmente en un juego de fingir coincidencias, es denunciar a toda posibilidad de un examen.*⁴⁸⁴

Although *Martín Fierro* is not an epic poem in the classical sense, Borges claims that the *conditions of the novel* obtain perfectly well to it. Clearly the novel's standard ingredients of progressive character development, the characters' self-reflectivity and reflection on their environments, and an episodic framework, contribute to the canonisation of *Martín Fierro*, just as they do for Borges' other favourites like the novels of Dostoyevsky, Zola, Butler, Flaubert, Dickens and Mark Twain. *Martín Fierro* functions as novel, but it does so without the name.

4.2.4 Superstition

Borges continues his critique of particularising forces in literature in 'La supersticiosa ética del lector'. This time the reader's 'superstitious ethic' comes about as the product of excessive attention to the details of the work, instead of to the larger impressions to be gained from a less factitious reading. Borges uses the position of stylistic critique he'd developed in 'La poesía gauchesca' to account for the general un-universality of Argentine literature:

*La condición indigente de nuestras letras, su incapacidad de atraer, han producido una superstición del estilo, una distraída lectura de atenciones parciales.*⁴⁸⁵

Within such reading form becomes everything, content nothing. Borges lambasts the tribe of Argentine *litterateurs* as 'indifferent to conviction or emotion itself,' a coven whose articles of faith consist of affirming that,

*la adjetivación no debe ser trivial y opinarán que está mal escrita una página si no hay sorpresas en la juntura de adjetivos con sustantivos, aunque su finalidad general esté realizada.*⁴⁸⁶

Here Borges is extending an argument that he'd once formulated in his first and only poetic manifesto, 'Ultraísmo' which outlined the course the new poetic movement was to follow in its war against the classicising excesses of the past. Inaugurated by the Castilian poets Rafael Cansinos Asséns and Gómez de la Serna in 1918 at Madrid's *Café Colonial*, the *Ultraístas* aimed to renovate Spanish poetry's technical overburden by concentrating on the imagic quality of language.⁴⁸⁷ For Asséns,

*[E]l Ultraísmo es una voluntad caudalosa que rebasa todo limite escolástico. Es una orientación hacia continuas y reiteradas evoluciones, un propósito de perenne juventud literaria, una anticipada aceptación de todo módulo y de toda idea nuevos. Representa el compromiso de ir avanzando con el tiempo.*⁴⁸⁸

Although such a declaration is not unique - one finds this sort of thing also being written by Symbolists, Vorticists, Futurists and Surrealists⁴⁸⁹ - it does allow Borges to found his views on what should motivate the new writing. Yet, the passage he quotes contains a performative contradiction and a cultural disjuncture. The Spanish *Ultraístas* were interested in the modern age, in aeroplanes, locomotives and the telephone. Seeing no way to avoid such technological bric-à-brac they embraced it. Of course, they were motivated by a reaction against their own founding fathers - the *Modernistas*, whose outlook was romantic and proto-nostalgic, their verse complex, highly structured, and lexically dense.⁴⁹⁰ (Hence Borges' earlier criticisms of 'adjectivisation' above.) In order to move away from these new rather Gongoristic poets (like Salvador Rueda Santos 1857-1933, Antonio Machado y Ruiz 1875-1939, and Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo 1864-1936, usually simply referred to as Unamuno) the Spanish *Ultraístas* adopted a free verse style of varying metre, simple imagery and personal voice to communicate their rebellion against what they saw as a stifling oppression by the academicians.⁴⁹¹ However, the rebellion in Spain had only the romanticised *campesino* peasantry to kick against, which seemed rather socially negligent. To embrace what Asséns called contemporary life was no better, since the technologising rhetoric of *Ultraism* in the Old World necessitated an equally callous celebration of the machine age, and by default, of those who were now to be cast as the exploiters of human labour. Trapped by the professed but

contradictory loves of both *homo modernus* and *homo proletarius* they practically abandoned technology as a motif and retreated to an intimist position that was doomed to collapse by implosion.

4.2.5 Borges' Negotiation of Argentine Ultraism

Hispanic *Ultraism* on the other hand, had a more virile tradition to confront. The poets who come in for censure by Borges and Asséns may have been South Americans of a Castilianizing bent, but they were poets from the New World nonetheless. As Borges remarks, Spanish *Ultraism* was more concerned with technologically-driven renovation than the pure poetic idealism of the Buenos Aires group.⁴⁹²

Leopoldo Lugones idolised Victor Hugo in France, but he also wrote *La Guerra de los Gauchos* and later *The Dry River Ballads*, which celebrate martial masculinity in a context peculiar to Latin America. Rubén Darío, while not a jingoistic patriot, harked back to an America he saw as imbued with a classical virility. For the *Ultraístas* to overcome this historicising trend they'd have to abandon the rural labourer for the rurality of daily life. To avoid the excesses of the machine age that was enjoying a special momentum with Argentina's emergence into the twentieth century as a major producer of beef and tin, Ultraism's Hispanic branch-office would have to adopt a strategy no less inwardly directed than its Castilian cousin. The result was a tendency to concentrate on the domestic and astronomical features of imagic life. Aeroplanes and locomotives, the modern rush of zinc-plated life, evaporates. Another feature is that the people are supplanted by the personal; *Ultraism* becomes a poetry of the first-person narrative. Within such a movement it was inevitable a somehow lexically "primitive" form of speech should come to the fore. This is how Asséns can speak on one hand about sweeping away scholasticism, and then go on to celebrate continual and repeated evolutions. Metaphor, instead of an adjectivised form of speech, was to be created as the new vehicle that would rid Modernist poetry of its cobwebs. Unlike ordinary descriptive speech, metaphors rely on startling conjunctions of nouns and verbs allowing us to see objects or processes in a new light. However, they have an advantage over standard poetic description: implicit dynamism. Because their operation is "verbal" instead of "adjectival" they seem to possess a vitalism lending them the impression of motion. This in turn leads to a contagion of images, a telescoping interaction of meanings. As Borges explains,

*[L]os poemas ultraicos constan pues de una serie de metáforas, cada una de las cuales tiene sugestividad propia y compendiza una visión inédita de algún fragmento de la vida.*⁴⁹³

Yet, while the metaphors are novel, their raw material is linguistically conventional. Founding a new poetry on an old sub-stratum can only be excused if the means by which it's created is radically different, hence the *Ultraístas'* reliance on *formal* innovation as a way of departing from classical Modernism.⁴⁹⁴ Whether or not they were successful is a debatable point - despite irregular metre and phrasing there are at least as many nightingales and moonlit nights in the successor as in the predecessor. However, this matters less than the effect such propagandising had on Borges' ideas about the strategies of poetic thought.⁴⁹⁵ Borges sought an *Ultraism* that «tiende a la meta primicial de toda poesía, a la transmutación de la realidad palpable del mundo en realidad interior y emocional». ⁴⁹⁶ This is what drives him in the later essays to eschew the virtues of local colour and excessive description. The gaucho Martín Fierro is validated in Borges' eyes when he desists from the physical and opts for the eternal and philosophical. The payadores of the outskirts emerge into their true life, that of interior and emotional reality, when they forget they are colourful characters and begin speaking like human beings struggling with the dilemmas of existence.

Borges' use of metaphor in the earlier *Ultraísta* phase of his creative development is easier to describe than theorise. One thing stands out, however, and that is the rejection of psychic description as a valid means of pursuing narrative art. The aim of the *Ultraístas* was not to portray life through words, but to set down the words that would create life. This is the meaning of the phrase *una visión inédita de algún fragmento de la vida*. By setting down the minimum of biographical content the *Ultraístas* believed the true processes of human life would come to the surface of the text in the act of reading. The idea is close to that of Borges' reading of Mallarmé where the explicit description of a thing detracts from the joy of progressive discovery - «la felicidad de ir adivinando». ⁴⁹⁷ In their war on excessive technicality the *Ultraístas* believed only simple speech could save poetic expression from the artificial evils of rhetorical flourish. Such

speech was to contain within the whole possibility of poetic expression:

*Ni la escritura apresurada y jadeante de algunas fragmentarias percepciones ni los gironcillos autobiográficos arrancados a la totalidad de los estados de conciencia y malamente copiados, merecen ser poesía.*⁴⁹⁸

For this reason too the exuberance of jargon was to be likewise avoided. What Borges calls the «palabrejas en lunfardo» or Lunfardo bastard-words, to which those who were striving to set down poetry away from the influence of *lo buen castellano* were irresistibly drawn, must equally be steered away from. In his mission-statement for *Ultraism* Borges proposed four cardinal points:

Figure 1

- 1.º - *Reducción de la lírica a su elemento primordial: la metáfora.*
- 2.º - *Tachadura de las frases medianeras, los nexos, y los adjetivos inútiles.*
- 3.º - *Abolición de los trebejos ornamentales, el confesionalismo, la circunstanciación, las prédicas y la nebulosidad rehusada.*
- 4.º - *Síntesis de dos o más imágenes en una, que ensancha de ese modo su facultad de sugerencia.*⁴⁹⁹

We note that the third criterion explicitly rejects confessionalism. Borges' first volume of poems *Fervor de Buenos Aires* contains some love poems cast in the confessional mode. The depiction of romantic regret was to remain a strong feature of his verse throughout his life. As to his reputation as an *Ultraísta* Borges once remarked,

*[A]s to whether the poems in Fervor are ultraist or not, the answer - for me - was given by my friend and French translator Néstor Ibarra, who said, "Borges left off being an ultraist poet with the first ultraist poem he wrote."*⁵⁰⁰

Whether Borges really did depart from his own programme or not is a moot point. One thing is certain. The first and fourth points of his

manifesto (the reduction of lyric to its primordial element - metaphor, and the synthesis of two or more images in one) describe the basis of a narrative practice that was to make his name first in his native Argentina (and then in France, the US and Great Britain) as a writer of exceptionally descriptive condensation. The elimination of rhetorical flourish inevitably creates a pared-down apparatus for poetic description. Not only the words in themselves and the images they convey, but the conjunction of these images alone might now perform the task of artistic portrayal.

4.2.6 *The Kenning as a (Borgesian) Exploration of Metaphor*

Borges was to describe this process four years later in two essays collected in the 1936 volume *Historia de la eternidad* entitled 'Las kenningar,' and 'La metáfora.' The first of these is an exploration of early Icelandic poetry. Pursuing the strict demarcation between a poetry that relies on the *combinational forms* of its vocabulary to convey meaning, and a poetry that rests on the supposition of psychological and emotional description for its effects, Borges seeks to understand the power of metaphor at its root:

*Una de las más frías aberraciones que las historias literarias registran son las menciones enigmáticas o kenningar de la poesía de Islandia. Cundieron hacia el año 100: tiempo en que los thulir o rapsodas repetidores anónimos fueron desposeídos por los escaldos, poetas de intención personal.*⁵⁰¹

Borges' irony when he refers to this aberration masks a conviction of the fundamental deviation in opting for the personal over the formal aspect in art. The Skalds recreate the Icelandic *saga* along Iliadic lines, but the celebration of the personalities of their heroes camouflages a series of semantic interactions seen as primal for meaning. Borges is not wholly scathing to the depiction of personality in art. Recognising its indispensability in narrative he merely calls for an investigation of an originary element in its development:

*Es común atribuir las a decadencia; pero ese depresivo dictamen, válido o no, corresponde a la solución del problema, no a su planteo. Bástenos reconocer por ahora que fueron el primer deliberado goce verbal de una literatura instintiva.*⁵⁰²

The *kenningar* were stock metaphors for climactic events in the life of the Icelandic warrior. Because of this they assumed a quasi-magical power as the verbal expression of physical acts. One sees the same thing with the incantation of magic formulae whose very words are felt to possess unseen, possibly malevolent, potential. Our own experience today is not wholly denuded of such phenomena. The *tapu*, a word that can't be uttered for fear of attracting the *mana* that informs the spiritual universe, is still a feature of ordinary life in Polynesia. The ban on the name of a dead person in Australian Aboriginal culture, together with a complete name change for all the members of the deceased's immediate family, speaks eloquently for the power of ritual silence.⁵⁰³ Borges goes on to explain that the Icelandic *kenningar* partakes of this tradition, but instead of the suppression of the word, they clothe it in other vestments.⁵⁰⁴ *Kenningar* operate as the linguistic paraphrase of sacred phenomena, concealing their power through the symbolic transference of the event into (primarily) visual imagery. Thus, the periphrases for battle and corpse become magically transmogrified into *tempestad de espadas* (sword storm) and *alimento de cuervos* (crows' food) respectively.⁵⁰⁵

However, the *kenningar* aren't simple substitutions. Borges points out they operate at two levels of description. The first is a portrayal of a natural element in the universe that can be transposed within its own metaphorical stratum. The second is attributive and designed to connect the subject to a mythical deed. In the lines from the *Grettir Saga*,

*[E]l aniquilador de la prole de los gigantes
Quebró al fuerte bisonte de la pradera de la gaviota.*⁵⁰⁶

Gull's meadow is obviously the sea, while being a *bison* reflects the power of the appellation, leading to the image of a ship at sea, which in this case refers to Thor, for it was Thor who was powerful enough to kill the giants' offspring. Thor, as the killer of the giants' offspring can't so easily be reduced to a visual equivalent since it relates to mythical history, while *gull's meadow* approximates to *sword's water* and *crow's food*. This is the second order of metaphoric description. In eschewing visual imagery for a quasi-historical reference it settles itself in the human present as a marker to the past, even if that past is totally fantastic. This is the nub of narrative convention: things have

happened, and they happened in a past to which human imagination can be applied.⁵⁰⁷ However, this imagination is one of memory, the recollector of events is cast between them and the present where the tale is told. No matter how vivid these images are they can never escape the temporality of their situation. The narrator is relating things that have happened, and because they have happened they're dead, wished into life by a subjective act of fantastic projection. Their status as simulacra is too apparent to allow them to be incorporated by their audience.

Borges contrasts the historicised *kenningar* with their free-floating first-order cousins. In one of the verses of Egil Skallagrímsson Borges compares the historicised euphemisms of *Hierros* (Irons) for the gods, with «El halcón del rocío de la espada» ('The falcon of sword dew', Line Three) and «Serpientes de la luna de los piratas» ('Serpents of the pirates' moon,' Line Five). Sword dew obviously connotes blood, while the figure of the falcon refers to a poetic image. The pirates' moon is a shield, from the habit of placing the shields of warriors along the rail of the long ship for battle. In this context their 'serpents' are the spears' heads peeping from behind them in the hands of their masters. Borges discovers a curious autonomy in the images used that gives them a life of their own, beyond the text in which they occur:

*Versos como el tercero y el quinto, deparan una satisfacción casi orgánica. Lo que procuran transmitir es indiferente, lo que sugieren nulo. No invitan a soñar, no provocan imágenes o pasiones; no son un punto de partida, son términos.*⁵⁰⁸

It might be thought such *terminal* images would disadvantage the verse where they find themselves. Evoking neither passion nor imagery their presence would be neutral to the narrative of human action. And this is the point they function as *basic* symbolic operators. Their purpose is neither hortatory nor historical.

*El agrado - el suficiente y mínimo agrado - está en su variedad, en el heterogéneo contacto de sus palabras. Es posible que así lo comprendieron los inventores y que su carácter de símbolos fuera un mero suborno a la inteligencia.*⁵⁰⁹

The *kenningar* were created as a means of avoiding undue repetition in Norse poetry. Because the implementa of battle had to be described again and again in Saga literature the *Thulir* employed varied metaphors to convey the meaning of these objects in different ways. Now because each single word conveys a range of associations (connotation) the *kenningar*, which were composed of at least two words, were always ready to function outside the bounds of their atomic signification. They are, in a Russellian sense, complex expressions.⁵¹⁰ However, because they make no direct reference to historical or mythological subjects their character is ontologically purer than those expressions already embedded in a personal contact with the personalised world of human events. The 'sufficient and minimum pleasure' they give in 'the heterogenous contact of their words' is directly anticipated by Borges' in the *Ultraísta* manifesto when he speaks of 'the reduction of lyric to its primordial element - metaphor,' and 'the synthesis of two or more images in one, in this way amplifying their suggestibility'.⁵¹¹ Their suggestibility comes about as the direct result of their further contact with other images, metaphor becomes imagic contagion, and it is these images and their mutual contamination that furnish the basis of a symbolic repertoire. The *Ultraísta* poems are the further combination of these molecular expressions, consisting 'of a series of metaphors, every one of each has its own suggestivity and contains an unexplored vision of a fragment of life'.⁵¹²

4.2.7 Extending Metaphoric Relations Through the Kenning

There is a myriad of Norse *kennings*. Borges painstakingly compiles a list of euphemisms for features of the environment (the air, rivers, the sun, the earth, summer, the wind), war paraphernalia (shields, swords, arrows, battle-axes), and parts of the body (the arm, the head, the heart, the hand). The *kenning* for the sword has ten variants, most of which repeat key features:

hielo de la pelea (ice of the fight)
vara de la ira (staff of ire)
fuego de yelmos (fire of the helmets)
dragón de la espada (sword of the dragon)
roedor de yelmos (gnawer of helmets)
espinas de la batalla (thorn of battle)
pez de la batalla (fish of battle)

remo de la sangre (oar of blood)
lobo de las heridas (wolf of wounds)
*rama de la heridas (limb of wounds)*⁵¹³

Borges quotes the *kenningar* at such length in order to illustrate a basic generative principle: each of the terms on the extreme left hand side ('gnawer,' 'thorn') can be alternated with each of the terms which follows it. Thus, one describes a sword as the 'thorn of blood' or the 'staff of wounds'. Others are telescoped into metaphoric complexes like: «*los aborrecedores de la nieve del puesto del halcón*» (haters of the snow of the falcon's post) where the 'post of the falcon' is the falconer's gloved hand, and the 'snow' relates to silver coins that fall like snow from the hand. Thus, to be a hater of the snow of the falcon's post is to be disdainful of money.

Borges isolates a passage from the Icelandic composer of the *Edda* Snorri Sturluson illustrating the metaphoric transcription of corporeal effects to the wider world. Snorri explains that gold is well described as the fire of arms and legs, since its colour is red. Conversely silver takes on the attributes of white objects, such as snow or ice. What Snorri neglects to tell us, but which Borges is hinting at, is the concealed and affective force of metaphoric transference. Gold may be the fire of arms and legs, but this is not simply due to its colour. The lust for gold inspires those limbs to procure it. Gold signifies lust, power, fire in the Norse saga literature, but it never does so for its own sake. Always transmitted through a physical agency, it signifies through the transfer of the desire that it invokes from the object itself to the agency instrumental to attain it.⁵¹⁴ In the primitive democracies of Iceland gold could never become associated with a state apparatus while individualism was rigorously cultivated. Among his examples Borges finds gold listed as «*fuego del mar*» (sea-fire), «*lecho de la serpiente*» (serpent's bed), «*resplandor de la mano*» (the hand's gleam) and «*bronce de discordias*» (bronze of discord).⁵¹⁵ Only this last is struggling to emerge into larger political life, but its progress is clearly halted by a negative connotation. In an earlier, and more highly developed social structure, the Roman Republican Cicero has no qualms about describing money as the sinews of war, just as George Farquhar would paraphrase him in the seventeenth century, enlisting it in the service of love as well.⁵¹⁶

4.2.8 Juxtaposition as Functional Dissonance in Metaphor

There is sometimes an inherent absurdity in metaphor that makes us stop and think. Borges is alive to the possibility that the power of metaphor relies on its shock-value. Metaphors can create an artificial and arbitrary conjunction taking us by surprise. This surprise is the well-spring of the *tone* of the work of art. The tone operates independently of the content: quite fearful metaphors can be produced by the juxtaposition of the most ordinary things, Lautréamont's umbrella and sewing-machine on a dissection-table, or G. K. Chesterton's '...cloud that is larger than the world / And a monster made of eyes' in *A Second Childhood*.⁵¹⁷ One remembers the quite extraordinary emphasis placed on the figure of *whiteness* in Melville's forty-second chapter of *Moby Dick* and the horror it provokes as he takes us on a nightmarish history of its power to amaze and terrify.⁵¹⁸

Borges enlarges on his exploration of metaphor, contrasting its facility in Germanic languages, and its *infelicity* in Romance languages where, for example, 'sword-water' must be translated either by the possessive form *agua de la espada*, or the adjectival form *agua militar*. Neither form is satisfactory since the possessive only means 'water of the sword,' i.e. water as the *possession* of the sword, which doesn't convey the poet's sense. The advantage of the *kenning* is in creating an unnatural relation between objects, a relation involving us in an interpretative exercise unsettling the world of ordinary reality. Borges gives us a glimpse of the nightmare this fundamental metaphor can become,

*[U]na vindicación final. El signo pierna del omóplato es raro, pero es menos raro que el brazo del hombre. Concebirlo como una vana pierna que proyectan las sisas de los chalecos y que se deshilacha en cinco dedos de penosa largura, es intuir su rareza fundamental. Las kenningar nos dictan ese asombro, nos extrañan del mundo. Pueden motivar esa lúcida perplejidad que es el único honor de la metafísica, su remuneración y su fuente.*⁵¹⁹

Metaphor's purpose is to estrange us from the world, not to comply with a need for mimetic verisimilitude. Certainly the transcription of the human clavicle as a useless leg poking out its five toes - this is what a clavicle, with the top five ribs of the attached, might really appear

when torn bodily from its unfortunate owner and left to bleach in the sun - brings us face-to-face with its elemental horror. What Borges calls 'the honour of metaphysics' is the identification of the strange and terrifying in ordinary life. Such an honour can't surely be garnered from the realistic treatment of life, or the attempt to portray psychological motives as the outcome of an inherently logical and mimetic process of association. Freud is a logician of the psyche, hence Borges opposes his method.⁵²⁰ Metaphors must be kept strange and inexplicable if they're to retain their power to shock, without which they'd have no interest. A fantastic tale without anything fantastic in it is unthinkable.

Borges continues his investigation of the strange and shocking in 'La metáfora', even offering an alternative to psychology in the justification of absurdity. Discussing the more bizarre *kenningar* of Snorri Sturluson he explains:

*Entretejidas en el verso y llevadas por él, estas metáforas deparan (o depararon) un asombro agradable; luego sentimos que no hay una emoción que las justifique y los juzgamos laboriosas e inútiles.*⁵²¹

Let's examine this flight into rationality. Borges mentions Aristotle's theory of metaphoric correspondence: even when two things seem to be different, they're linked by an analogy between themselves and a third term. This analogy is an intuition that there is a fundamental similarity between the images, and this is expressed in terms of an over-arching state of affairs. This is certainly the sense in which it's used in Aristotle's *De Partibus Animalium*; a fish's fins, or a horse's hooves and the legs of a person being compared through their common function of providing locomotion. It's somehow "natural" to think in terms of subsuming categories, but such thought can only produce a host of similarities. Homogenous and regularising, such thinking acts to reduce the possibility of surprise in ordinary life. The trick is not to disallow verbal combinations that appear to recognise no analogues in the real world. Whereas Aristotle bases metaphor on *things*, or physical relations in the world, Snorri provides an alternative based on *words*, or verbal relations. As Borges notes,

*...los tropos conservados por Snorri son (o parecen) resultados de un proceso mental, que no percibe analogías sino que combina palabras; alguno puede impresionar (cisne rojo, balcón de la sangre), pero nada revelan o comunican.*⁵²²

Far from being a disadvantage, Snorri's *kenningar* allow us to engage in an act of semantic conception beyond ordinary reality. They're the objectification of verbal relations: «objetos verbales, puros e independientes como un cristal o como un anillo de plata».⁵²³

Borges goes on to give a description of a variety of images that don't seem to be linked by a reliance on Aristotelian analogy. A certain Licofronte is supposed to have described the god Hercules as the 'lion of the triple night', since Hercules was sired by Zeus in a night lasting three days. Borges describes the phrase as memorable, and even beyond the interpretation of its glossers, but not amenable to incorporation within Aristotle's frame. Neither the species of Hercules nor the lion can be subsumed under the genus of animal to advance the metaphor. The triple night is equally intractable. However, put them together within their mythic context and *the lion of the triple night* assumes a poetic vitality that is clearly more than the sum of its parts.

4.2.9 A History of Elemental Transpositions

In the great hunt for metaphorical imagery Borges discovers two recurrent transpositions: death as sleep, and woman as rose. Although these examples are apparently trivial clichés, they refuse to operate tidily in Aristotle's plan. Hamlet compares death to sleep in the play's most famous soliloquy. Schopenhauer, more pessimistically, writes that what sleep is for the individual, death is for species.⁵²⁴ The blues of Para Handy describe death as the old rockin' chair, that is, as the last tranquillity of the Negro. The biblical David in *Kings I, 2: 10 goes to sleep with his fathers.*⁵²⁵ Death and sleep are *equated* but they can't be placed neatly under a categorical heading dealing with both phenomena. Unlike feet and hooves and fishes' fins, death and sleep aren't species of non-existence, but name a verbal relation beyond the reach of identification. That's why they must always exist in tandem in the poetic tradition. These are conventionalised, but the verbal object they name, the *feeling* they allow us to experience (tranquillity? awe? dread?) remains indeterminate.

Borges' investigation of the link between flowers and women in poetic description deviates from the standard equivalences. From the *Song of Songs*' lines about the Rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, Sigrid's last union with Kriemhold in the *Nibelungenlied* is accompanied by his description of her complexion as of the colour of roses, Ariosto compares a damsel with a secret flower, etc. But Shakespeare introduces a note of oblique reference in the ninety-eighth Sonnet when, in mentioning the deep vermilion of the roses and the whiteness of lilies in a garden, he refers not to a present object of reflection, but to his *absent* love. The instance is important because it gives a clue to the way in which metaphoric transference assumes a quasi-mystical significance for Borges.⁵²⁶ It's not the mundane comparison of the real world with that of imagination that is vital for the understanding of his theory of verbal relations (a theory that will be the basis for all the great *ficciones*) but the shifting of meaning between mundane points of reference. This is a horizontal theory of signification where meaning is distributed along a line of verbal reference points instead of under hierarchical categories. Borges was to first outline this thought, possibly his most important, in his first and only volume of *Ultraísta* poetry, *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. 'The Rose' describes a mysterious and eternal rose, a rose that is absent:

*La rosa,
la inmarcesible rosa que no canto,
la que es peso y fragancia,
la del negro jardín en la alta noche,
la de cualquier jardín y cualquier tarde,
la rosa que resurge de la tenue
ceniza por el arte de la alquimia,
la rosa de los persas y de Ariosto,
la que siempre está sola,
la que siempre es la rosa de las rosas,
la joven flor platónica,
la ardiente y ciega rosa que no canto,
la rosa inalcanzable.*⁵²⁷

A rose that is described in loving detail, but which still remains unreachable. Borges' insight into the inadequacies of analogic description, of a theory of description based on mimetic effects, was

to provide a fundamental platform for work throughout his life.⁵²⁸ In 'Narrative Art and Magic' he makes the point that it's usual to ascribe great works of art with a metaphoric fecundity they perhaps don't in themselves possess. The *Iliad* contains a number of metaphoric transcriptions (dream for life, sleep for death, etc.) but their number is nonetheless finite. Within the context of the work itself these metaphoric transcriptions obey a high level of standardisation, acting as clichés that produce the stock effects of great drama: the hero compares his life to a dream, the hero dies in the sleep of life, etc. The fact that a long poem composed three thousand years ago can still evoke excitement today is due to the connections readers make with the action of the text and their contemporary situation.⁵²⁹ This link is based on a series of fundamental metaphors that are so imprecise they allow innumerable interpretations. And, because they fall outside the hierarchical scheme of analogy, they remain unencumbered by the dead-weight of an authorised reading. Who would suspect asks Borges, that 'the old rockin' chair' and 'David went to sleep with his fathers' proceed from the same origin? Yet, they seem to; death as the sleep of life provides both with a meaning still as powerful today as it ever was. Even if the dead appear to be like the sleeping, and the sleeping resemble the dead, both terms fulfilling a mimetic correspondence, the link between living and dreaming obeys no such similitude outside the purely verbal conjunction of the word *life* with the word *dream*. As Borges outlines in his theory of imagic contagion: the pleasure of metaphors - their sufficient and minimum pleasure - is in their variety, in the heterogenous contact of their words.⁵³⁰

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 4.3

Borges extends his theory of formal relations to a system of verbal idealism: the complexes that we apprehend in narrative must have an existence as prescriptive cultural and psychological orthodoxies. While emotional response is still vital for the reader's sympathetic allegiance, the work of art that employs them successfully will be "recognised" as valid for all members of that culture. I call this process radical objective identification, and use Borges' comments on the reception of film imagery to construct a parallel argument to his understanding of the reception of narrative objects.

4.3 *Magic causality as a Theory of Verbal Idealism*

Borges appears to be a verbal idealist. As his poem 'The Rose' makes plain, the rose about which he sings exists in no earthly garden. Rather, as the 'youthful Platonic flower' its existence is ideal, or imaginary. However, Borges is not suggesting it exists in a technically qualifiable sense as a Platonic Form. Burning, blind, without weight or fragrance, ever unattainable, its existence is as of an imaginary object of consciousness rather than as a primal essence to which all the properties of earthly roses can be attributed. Even Platonic roses aren't completely divorced from their material being, since they, at the very least, have a rose-shape, which must be the product of material properties.

4.3.1 *From Formal to Ideal Relations of Language in Borges' Work*

That Borges is actively aware of the distinction between formal and ideal relations, and is working to construct a theory of the latter, is plain from his views on reception. I have already commented on Borges' criticisms of the particularising trend in Argentine literature in 'La supersticiosa ética del lector.' The essay also contains reflections on the manner in which the idea of perfectibility in literature can forestall the reader's appreciation of the text as an heterogeneous play of symbols. The ideal texts are made up of symbols which refuse to be subsumed under hierarchical structures, but live their own unruly lives in a series of horizontal relations, as was broached in 'Las kenningar,' and 'La metáfora'. However, the idea needs collaborative theorisation. There is a problem with origins. For example, how do words take on the associations that allow them to generate their unique characters in metaphor? If words name things, then what nature do these things have when they occur as *kenningar*? Why is 'sword-water' for example, evocative? What part does idealisation play in the creation of metaphor? Most importantly, does idealisation occur before or after the creation of metaphor? Words, as semantic primitives, seem to be metaphors waiting to happen. If so, what rules might there be to establish the peculiar fecundity of certain metaphors? There appears to be a hierarchy of symbolic complexes.

4.3.2 Don Quijote and "Don Quijote" in Don Quijote

Borges' censure of the 'superstitious' reader stems from the over-use of the distinction between form and content in literary criticism. The critic subordinates emotional evocation in the text to stylistic cavilling, hoping (a very emotional term) to perfect a series of procedures by which to judge a work good, bad or indifferent. The result is an affective inhibition. Readers become critics, in the pejorative sense of the word, unable to be affected by the work as an artistic experience. Whether or not Borges' views are an accurate reflection of Hispanic literary scholarship is debatable. The same criticisms of the *Quijote*'s structure he mentions by Balthazar Gracián, Quevedo and Lugones, he himself corroborates in calling the book essentially shapeless and referring to its flimsy plot and adventures that go nowhere.⁵³¹ What is vital for our understanding of his ideas is the part artistic preconception plays in stifling emotional response in the audience, and how emotional response is generated in the first place. Borges comments on the received wisdom that style is important and that other factors may be dispensed with in a discussion of the *Quijote*:

*La crítica española, ante la probada excelencia de esa novela, no ha querido pensar que su mayor (y tal vez único irrecusable) valor fuera el psicológico, y le atribuye dones de estilo, que a muchos parecerán misteriosos.*⁵³²

Borges is not referring to the psychology of the novel of character, but to an elemental, certainly pre-Freudian, and commonsense psychology of character motivation. The ingenious gentleman Don Quijote acts in accordance with his peculiar folly. As an addict of the *novela de caballerías* he identifies with the fictions he reads. His madness becomes an act of continuous ritual mimesis every bit as complex as the models he has naturalised.⁵³³ But exactly because the character has imbibed a multiplicity of models, his own character is fated to pursue a series of logical accommodations when the models conflict. The hero's character is multiple because his sources are multiple, he is therefore led to his adventures by a 'madness' emerging as the result of ritual adjustments to a reality he can't, for reasons Cervantes leaves blank, stand to confront. Don Quijote's journey is an escape into fantasy - that much is obvious - but this escape obeys definite causal laws.⁵³⁴

The preceding paragraph is by now a staple of Cervantes scholarship. It's also the *Quijote* seen from the point of view of the author, who writes so the reader may receive. If this reception is captious it's not so much the fault of the reader, but of a certain type of reader, one who has already become incorporated into the world of the critic and who expects perfection and permanence in the work of art. The reader who enjoys the work, who greets its hero as a friend instead of as an opponent to be analysed and overcome, can't harp on inconsistencies but should welcome them. It is the inconsistencies that make the hero recognisable as an object of sympathetic identification. The windmill-chasing, good-advice ignoring Don Quijote who exists in human minds as a new fact of emotional life is for Borges more valuable than the two-dimensional perfection of the flat character. It's by being received by its audience as a product of the imagination that a character assumes an individual life,

*[M]ás vivo es el fantasma alemana o escandinavo o indostánico del Quijote que los ansiosos artificios verbales del estilista.*⁵³⁵

It's not the perfections alone of literature that make it immortal, but its imperfections as well. Borges discounts the idea of technical perfection as a verbal idea embodied in words such as 'perfection' itself. Such words postulate an unreachable target having no place in human art, although they're part of the normal technicality of artistic creation. What makes them effective is the image of the state they purport to describe. In ordinary life a perfect work must somehow be preferable to an imperfect one, if we are lexically, and conceptually, orthodox. Borges rejects the idea on the basis that what is described when we use the word "perfect" is a semantic distinction masquerading as a qualitative one. Speaking of this defect in critics he says,

*[N]o piensan que decir de más una cosa es tan de inhábiles como no decirla del todo, y que la descuidada generalización e intensificación es una pobreza y que así la siente el lector.*⁵³⁶

Of course, for Borges a balance might be struck between art and the human in the art work, otherwise it loses its ability to convince us of its reality. Poetic faith can only be achieved, as in the example of Morris' *The Life and Death of Jason*, by allowing the reader to create

conditions of apprehension that suspend the criticalities of disbelief. We are allowed to view select images and situations through the eyes of characters with whom an affective sympathy has already been established. Thus, the images and situations themselves take on a double significance as the reader's attention is divided between his or her own expectations, and those for the character. Instead of *reducing* critical judgement by this emotional division of labour, identification is exaggerated. The character's fears and hopes become those of the reader, and our newly manufactured expectations are transplanted onto the character, who takes on the quality of an affective object. We make the "read" into reality by an act of affective displacement whose progress is determined by the conventions of plot and structure.

4.3.4 *Beyond the Human Work of Art*

However, what makes one of these displacements really convincing, and what are its constitutive elements? Just as in the *Jason* example Borges says it's not so much the explicit detail in the text that gives it its power, but its suggestibility, which aids in our construction of the text as a piece of the real world. This suggestibility is an effect of the manipulation of the reader's emotions through the presentation of facts-in-the-text leading to definite conclusions. The slave is given a presentiment of the horror the centaur's appearance will provoke, so we also anticipate this horror, and aren't disappointed when the terrible moment comes. However, the description is kept deliberately hazy so that the basic improbability of Chiron is never allowed to intrude on our critical sensibility. The centaur is an assemblage of ambiguous images, half man, half horse, but our belief in the patchwork of impossible conjunction is maintained by the effort of the slave's courageous act in confronting it.⁵³⁷ Does the fact of the centaur's impossible duality have a part to play in the suspension of disbelief. Why not make the object of the slave's terror a natural object like a wolf or a bear? Morris introduces the centaur in such commonplace company, but this is only to allow our disbelief to be gulled. We know about wolves and bears, and so we "know about" centaurs because of a transplantable recourse to reality. (We "know about" flying- saucers and the Loch Ness Monster in the same way as soon as we admit to the slightest shred of their physical plausibility - they *might* exist just as the Space Shuttle and the Coelacanth exist.)⁵³⁸ At this stage Morris does not require complete faith, which would in any case be impossible to achieve so early given the artificial

mode of transmission - epic poetry in Victorian English. The goal is only the introduction of an image that will work through our transferred fears for the slave's safety.

4.3.5 Radical Objective Identification (ROI)

It's obvious Borges has two strategies of affective assent operating at the same time. The first is the suspension of disbelief through the manipulation of our emotions, which is the standard of the story-teller. The second is more elusive and forms an important element in magic causality that we may call Radical Objective Identification (ROI).⁵³⁹ While our emotions are manipulated by rhetorical strategies of incorporation and collusion, the objects upon which these emotions play are determined by the interplay of their physical reality and their symbolic significance. The Centaur's physical reality is a function of the identification of the parts that make him up - horse and man.⁵⁴⁰ This constitutes the temporalisation of Chiron's atomic particularity, if you like.⁵⁴¹ His symbolic significance is the product of these parts' embedding in the mythic realm: a horse's power and vitality, a man's intelligence, reason, cunning. Where symbolic features overlap, as in the sexuality of both horse and man, the effect is amplified and made more powerful, defining the symbol's major chord. The Centaurs are a race well nigh always identified with their lustful appetites. How this double-play of the image affects our expectations for the text is the subject of the following discussion of Borges' ideas on the framing of filmic narrative and the production of symbol in three essays 'Films,' and 'Sobre el doblaje' (On Dubbing) and 'El Dr. Jekyll y Edward Hyde, transformados' (Dr. Jekyll and Edward Hyde Transformed).⁵⁴²

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 4.4

Because film images are received in the same way as narrational images, both relying on the shock of realism to enlist our suspended disbelief, anything that disturbs our faith in the verisimilitude of the image also destroys our ability to experientially incorporate it. Dubbing is seen as a case in point, creating a radical disjuncture that must be either ignored, or received as true in an act of mauvais foi. But how is Borges to explain how images are received and checked against our conceptual apparatus? He uses the example of the “empty catalogue” to demonstrate the difference between merely noting a fact and incorporating it with in a conceptual framework. Góngora alienates his audience’s receptive capacity to create conditions in which the work of art can be received as such.

4.4 The Film Image as Iconographic Complex

Return to the Big Screen

Borges had objected to the critical reception of the art work in terms of artistic preconceptions. For the critics style is the key: perfect style produces perfect art. However, as style is technically unperfectible - evidenced by competing critical opinion - the art work relies on its ability to move its audience for its longevity. Formal values are important, but they can't be the whole end of art. Borges continues his critique of formal values in posing objections to both excessive realism and the fantastic in contemporary film. His criticisms are coherent and progressive, and can be read as carrying the investigation of Radical Objective Identification (ROI) forward into a theory of symbolic mythology. Fedor Ozep's *El asesino Karamasoff* (Der Mörder Dimitri Karamasoff, 1931) manages to transcend then contemporary German film production by eluding the standard errors of,

*...la simbología lóbrega, la tautología o vana repetición de imágenes equivalentes, la obscendencia, las aficiones teratológicas, el satanismo...*⁵⁴³

Side-stepping Borges' more emotionally charged censures of the Expressionist school, it's plain his criticisms rest on concerns for symbolic economy. The film image must not be repeated unless it conveys new information. This presupposes the film image is capable of conveying information in the first place. At the time Borges had not read Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamasov*, a fact he notes without the slightest trace of self-consciousness, so the experience of the film remains imaginatively primitive:

*Su realidad, aunque puramente alucinatoria...[S]u presentación de una genuina, candorosa felicidad después de un asesinato, es uno de sus altos momentos. Las fotografías - la del amanecer ya preciso, la de las bolas monumentales de billar aguardando el impacto, la de la mano clerical de Smerdyakov, retirando el dinero - son excelentes, de invención y de ejecución.*⁵⁴⁴

4.4.1 The Iconographic Complex and Super-Reality Effects

Borges' enthusiasm is sparked not so much by the plot of *El asesino Karamasoff*, but by its scenic episodes. The reality the film imparts is achieved because of the exaggerated reality of its elements. Smerdyakov's hand slithers over the banknotes with insufferable deliberation, the billiard balls, paragons of geometrical relations on their ocean of green baize, taunt the spectator with the expectation of impact. These incidents are real in the sense they can be located as phenomena in the real world, but the care with which the spectator's eye is drawn to them belongs to the cinematic excesses of nightmare. This is the key to our understanding of Radical Objective Identification (ROI) in Borges' theory of imagic reception.⁵⁴⁵ To function as objects with a primitive value it's not necessary that the objects of Ozep's film be special in themselves (we find hands and billiard balls anywhere), but merely presented in such a way that their atomic particularity is impressed on the audience. The next time hands and billiard balls come into consciousness they will do so with an unexplained and puzzling force.

Borges contrasts Ozep's exaggeration of the usual with Chaplin's routinisation of the unusual in *City Lights*, 1931. Chaplin is a screen-idol, his face has slipped into the symbolic repertoire of the film-goer all over the world. By the 1930s Chaplin has assumed the imagic notoriety that would later accrue to Marilyn Monroe or Adolf Hitler. Charlie is alive and still producing films. His iconic quality is only as good as his last picture. As icon he is a victim of the law of diminishing symbolic returns: as the extraordinary increases so it must continue to be extraordinary at one remove from its own celebrity. Icons, unlike celebrities, aren't famous for being well-known in themselves. Their fame derives from outside themselves, they're elements of an extant repertoire, like Ozep's atomic billiard balls:

*¿Quién iba a atreverse a ignorar que Charlie Chaplin es uno de los dioses más seguros de la mitología de nuestro tiempo, una colega de las inmóviles pesadillas de Chirico, de las ferventes ametralladoras de Scarface Al, del universo finito aunque ilimitado, de las espaldas cenitales de Greta Garbo, de los tapiados ojos de Gandhi?*⁵⁴⁶

For Borges *City Lights* is a failure because it too obviously recapitulates the imagic repertoire of other directors. The icon goes in

company with other icons, but shouldn't partake of them. To do so leads the icon into a symbolic parasitism that quickly devolves into self-reference, and self-parody. Borges notes a peculiar lack of the unreal in Chaplin's film. Even the scene where the street-sweeper finds an elephant in the street already has its model in *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*⁵⁴⁷ where a Trojan street-sweeper encounters the Greeks' improbable wooden horse. Both incidents would be unreal in isolation, if we had not had one to remind us of the other, but with one following so closely on the heels of the other this recapitulation breaks our faith with the notion of Chaplin's genius.

However, even if *City Lights* had antedated its Trojan exemplar the problem of the film's stagy unreality would have to be overcome. An elephant in the street is extraordinary, but it's only extraordinary because of a geographic conjunction. Elephants aren't unusual in the zoo. Hands and billiard balls aren't unusual either, but when our attention is directed to them so painstakingly, as in Ozep's film of the crimes of the Karamasov bastard, they assume a significance commensurate with their status as icons of the real world. To be real in the sense of art is to be super-real. Like the agonisingly jerky progress of the baby-carriage in *Battleship Potemkin* exultant horror can be wrung from the most mundane subjects:

*Los rusos descubrieron que la fotografía oblicua (y por consiguiente deforme) de un botellón, de una cerviz de toro o de una columna, era de valor plástico superior a la mil y un extras de Hollywood, rápidamente disfrazados de asirios y luego barajados hasta la total vaguedad por Cecil B. de Mille.*⁵⁴⁸

4.4.2 Plasticity and Reality: *The Return of Billy the Kid*

The key to the film as narrative, and to narrative in general, is the isolation of the plastic image. What the anonymous Assyrians with fake-beards can't achieve is produced by the relatively simple means of allowing a baby-carriage to bump down a few steps, or even the sight of a few maggots in a side of beef. In terms of objective identification the physical radicals of baby-carriage and beef are overlaid with the symbolic significance of potential harm to a child in the first case, and the threat of disease, in the second. They function as reminders of our own unsafeness in the world. They also invoke this unsafeness whenever their real counterparts are come upon,

even though the actual memory is hazy. In a discussion of King Vidor's *Billy the Kid*, 1930, Borges gives an unwitting demonstration of the power of the plastic image (a power Roland Barthes would call 'obtuse') concerning a spoken phrase of incontestable callousness.⁵⁴⁹ Borges mentions the key elements of the film; studied and post-cardy shots of the desert, a virtuous hero, a romantic couple, an over-amplified Italian, etc.⁵⁵⁰ The anti-hero who forms the true subject of the film, a certain William Bonny, is studiously avoided, except for the reference to the fact he has killed twenty men, *not counting Mexicans*.⁵⁵¹ The phrase was to remain with him until his own ironic rewriting of the legendary bandit's tale in *Historia universal de la infamia* three years later:

*El desierto veteado de metales, árido y reluciente. El casi niño que al morir a los veintiún años debía a la justicia de los hombres veintiuna muertes - « sin contar mejicanos ».*⁵⁵²

The brutality of the phrase is plain enough, plainer in Spanish where the omission of the prepositional and humanising "a" before *mejicanos* in the accusative case places them into the category of trifling objects. These are objects that things may be done to with impunity, divested of special human quality. Borges mentions two books in his 'Índice de las fuentes,' Frederick Watson's *A Century of Gunmen*, (London, 1931) and Walter Noble Burns' *The Saga of Billy the Kid* (New York, 1925) but leaves out the King Vidor film that inspired it.⁵⁵³

On its own this may just seem an instance of repressed memory. Borges, having seen a film about a murderous historical celebrity, allows the story to surface in a short narrative he writes a few years later that eludes its filmic progenitor, but nonetheless pays *cinematic* reference to its original. The glittering desert in 'El asesino desinteresado Bill Harrigan' is a highly visual image inspired by the film. Even the title gives us a clue: the killer is disinterested, he has "lost sight" of his surroundings, both physical and moral. Borges *loses sight* of his original source to inscribe a new version of the story. The references are bookish and tendentious, the essayist venturing into narrative for the first time, taking his sources along for moral support. Bill Harrigan *alias* Bill Bonny *alias* William Bonny *alias* Billy the Kid is

a narrative reflection of his author's love of masks and dubious identities.⁵⁵⁴

Such speculations might delight literary Freudians, but they're technically superfluous for Borges' development of a magically causal poetics. *Historia de la infamia* is a collection of short pieces, fourteen in all, and the original for many can be traced to his previous reading. 'El incivil Maestro de Ceremonias Kotsuké no Suké' is a rewriting of the Seven Samurai that he read as a child. 'El atroz redentor Lazarus Morell' is an excursion into one of the by-ways of Mark Twain's South. 'La viuda Ching, pirata' sails off the coast of a recognisable Chinese mythology. The point is not important that a forebear may be found (Borges has always been adamant there is no new writing, that we are merely recirculating the components of a pre-existent literary universe) but the manner in which this forebear can be manipulated to fit into present textual reality.

4.4.3 Attempted Revoicings: How Historical Personality Constitutes Iconographic Reality

The narratives of *Historia de la infamia* aren't departures, but continuations of their prototypes. If they seem strange it's because they reflect their originals to us *obliquely*, as distortions of the text, exaggerations of one particular aspect. However, even though they distort, their character is still developmental, bifurcatory. Because of this quality their distortions can't be capricious, they might still fit too well with the background from which they're lifted, or else fall into complete unrecognisability. In an essay on arbitrary combinations, 'Sobre el doblaje,' Borges accuses the practice of giving Aldonza Lorenzo's (alias Dulcinea del Toboso) vocal characteristics to Greta Garbo for humorous effect, as that of creating a radical disjuncture eroding the textual reality of both parties, instead of creating a fruitful recombination:

*La voz de Hepburn o de Garbo no es contingente; es, para el mundo, uno de los atributos que las definen.*⁵⁵⁵

Thus, to arbitrarily combine the essential features of textual personalities would lead to a confusion in the mind of the audience. The textual personality would devolve into a contested identity unable to partake of either of its originals without falling into unrecognisability.

Dubbing is not the transference of attributes but their mutual nullification:

*Quienes defienden el doblaje razonarán (tal vez) que las objeciones que pueden oponérsele pueden oponerse también, a cualquier otro ejemplo de traducción. Ese argumento desconoce, o elude, el defecto centrale: el arbitrio injerto de otra voz y de otra lenguaje.*⁵⁵⁶

This grafting-on may be obvious, indeed it can't help but be. The audience is aware it's experiencing a transcribed reality whether it cares to admit it or not. To reason otherwise would be to insert Greta Garbo into the culture in which her image is portrayed as a native artefact. Such a thing is unimaginable, intolerable, one would have to be a cultural schizoid to even consider it.⁵⁵⁷ The iconography of an age is culture-bound, essentially untranslatable. The revoicing of images would be an assault on both the transmitter and the receiver alike. The transmitter culture would dilute the identity of its icons, and the receiver would relinquish cultural autonomy by allowing the intruder to be accepted by its unwitting audience. Dubbing is attempted cultural seduction, and, thank goodness, it isn't even successful since it involves the audience in an all-too-obvious deceit:

*Esto último es importante; peor que el doblaje, peor que la sustitución que importa el doblaje, es la conciencia general de una sustitución, de un engaño.*⁵⁵⁸

4.4.4 Pseudo-Participations in the Cinematic Narrative

Fraud. Deceit. The audience is conscious of being tricked. What possible reaction could there be to such a scandal but the interruption of the suspension of disbelief and the destruction of poetic faith? The outcome of dubbing is the implicit rejection of the work of art as authentic representation.⁵⁵⁹ Unable to transact symbolic identification with the characters the audience goes home strangely disappointed. The same effect occurs when the art work is transmitted across media. In an investigation of Stevenson's story of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* Borges describes the film versions as 'defamations'. In the story both characters are kept separate, the tale's conclusion emerges as the confrontation between two personalities rather than two persons. In the film version the audience is allowed to see behind the mirror - the technical virtuositities of Hollywood lay a lamentable emphasis on

the act of *transformation* rather than the act of revelation. Jekyll into Hyde and back again, all achieved with time-lapse photography and the application of mutton-chops. What was conceived as a morality tale is deformed into a tableau of special effects, an ironic parody of the original where exaggeration (wild Hyde) takes the place of restraint (modest Jekyll).

One notes two tendencies in Borges that seem to be contradictory. On the one hand there is the championing of cultural specificity, on the other the urge for universal literature. On the surface these two aims appear to be mutually exclusive, but this is only so if they're taken in the same textual plane. A national literature can produce a transcendent and complex textual object - the permanence of Homer's Achilles or Shakespeare's mournful Dane attests to this. In the same way the project can be a miserable failure through its reliance on a hokey universality, or rather the absence of individualising features - one has only to consult the card-board heroes of Agatha Christie or Conan Doyle for confirmation.⁵⁶⁰ To view literature as if from an Archimedean point of reflection - if only for a moment - is to survey the peaks and troughs of the art of personal seduction. This seduction is achieved in the willing suspension of the critical voice, in our readiness to believe. To read a book or watch a film is to have already entered into a contract with fantasy, possibly leading to an identification with the textual object. Even critique is an intrinsically 'fictive' act, placing us in contact with 'critical fictions' that can aid our interpretation of the text.⁵⁶¹ If the contract is successfully fulfilled it stands at an end in that particular case; the object of the text has become a permanent object of mind. It lives its own life, a life composed of a series of symbolic components - the encryption of the object from which nothing can be separated nor nothing added without irreparably altering it. Don Quijote without desire for Dulcinea, or lacking the timely, but disregarded, counsels of Sancho Panza is unthinkable. Who would rewrite *Hamlet* coming to terms with grief in five stages à la Kübler-Ross without making the morose protagonist unidentifiable against the back-ground of his unique textual domain? Parody fails to produce great art because it contemptuously dupes and insults its audience, foregrounding its own artifice at the price of credibility. That unintentional parody, the dubbed image, fails because it too obviously appears as a simulation of a (somewhere) culturally authentic experience.⁵⁶²

4.4.5 Croce to the Rescue? Against Intuitions

Ostensibly following Croce, Borges writes in 'La simulación de la imagen':

*Lo expresivo, nos ha contestado Croce, ya para siempre, y tan satisfactoria me es esa fórmula que ni siquiera pienso sacar de la estantería el libro en que está y verificar en él las palabras textuales (las representaciones textuales) de su escritor, y su apurada repartición del conocimiento en intuitivo y lógico, es decir, en productor de imágenes o de conceptos.*⁵⁶³

Borges' irony is clear and his point is well made. Because the expressive is eternal he has no need to verify it. The Crocean directive exists beyond the justification of its textual representation in the words on the page of a book, just as Borges' own expression of a thought needs no other justification than its mere presence. The intuition of the image of eternity is already eternal through being expressed, just as its logical concept persists in our consciousness.⁵⁶⁴

By stating the argument in these terms he includes himself within the eternal production of art through the expression of both a conceptual image and the logical concept accompanying it: «El arte es expresión y sólo expresión, postularé aquí»⁵⁶⁵

Borges proceeds to defend his use of the word 'image' against the more Crocean "intuition". Intuitions are direct sensory data that are shaped by their logical operation. To intuit is to form a sensation within the functional limits of the concept where it occurs. However, it may be objected the word *image* connotes a strictly visual phenomenon. To translate the Crocean intuition by *image* is not to substitute a visual word for a conceptual one Borges argues, because the Latin *imago* from which it derives, means image in the sense of representation, or simulation. The "image" of a thing is already its mental representation, regardless of the sensory pathway used to apprehend it.

4.4.6 The Paradox of the Empty Catalogue

In a discussion of Luis de Góngora's *Soledades* Borges notes the parade of visual imagery with which the author presents might otherwise account for the basic content of the poem. The unending

citation of the plumage of birds, the pelts of animals, ribbons, hens, hawks, etc. is the undeniable stuff of the work, but nonetheless it has always been regarded as rather *empty*.⁵⁶⁶ These images are piled-up one atop the other as if Góngora were compiling a visual catalogue of experience like addresses in a telephone-book. The multiplication of images can't convey anything except that very fact, that there are many images. The poem becomes engulfed by its content.⁵⁶⁷ Borges dismisses the use of intensifiers as a way around the problem: their function is reproductive, and therefore tautological. To say one thing is "rich" and another "richer" is to add nothing to the concept of "richness" that can't be added by the comparative "more." One can even adopt the expedient of adjectival duplication, "rich rich" being substituted for very rich.⁵⁶⁸ What is needed for the image to make sense to us *poetically* is some formulation exceeding the demands of mere description.⁵⁶⁹

However, just as *imago* has a double etymological life, so does *intuition*. Deriving from *intueri* meaning to be regarded, or watched, intuitions are intractably intuitive as watched things. Just as "to see" and "to watch" imply a progressive intensification, this intensification is inevitable as soon as we pretend to regard an image in anything more than its visual sense. There is always more to the image than meets the eye. Its content is somehow transformed by the concept that allows its expression.

This presents a problem where presentation is concerned. The presentation of the multitude of objects in Góngora is easily dealt with in a piecemeal fashion: as a hen is described a "hen" is mapped in consciousness, as a hawk is named so a "hawk" is called up to allow its representation, and so on. However, these are empty name-things for consciousness, they exist like items in a catalogue where image and concept exactly coincide. If this were all there were to poetry then lexicographers would be our greatest artists. Góngora's tumultuous inventory conveys not only its own meticulous content, but the secret fact of its existence as an inventory:

*Aquí, bajo la aparente seguridad de lo sentencioso, duele una equivocación parecida: la de inferir que don Luis de Góngora es claro, léase perspicuo, por su mencionar cosas claras, léase relucientes. La naturaleza de ese enredo es de calembour.*⁵⁷⁰

Borges contributes to the nightmare by constructing the essay itself that makes use of a framing device playing on the difference between content and definition. The form of the essay becomes a device for making the familiar strange and allowing us, in Foucault's phrase, to start thinking *that*.⁵⁷¹ Borges introduces a discussion on aesthetics by posing the counter-argument that «[I]ndagar ¿qué es lo estético? es indagar ¿qué otra cosa es lo estético, que única otra cosa es lo estético?». ⁵⁷² Obviously one can't find that aesthetics is both itself *and* something else, thus the nature of the other self of aesthetics stands in contradiction to its historically accepted definition as the science of the beautiful. Beauty, like reflection, involves the perceiver in an act of *re-guarding* (sic) the image. However, in this case the guarding has been unsuccessful, and the image slips through the net that would ensnare and press it firmly against the neatly defined horizons of our expectation.⁵⁷³ Borges sets up the trap by emphasising the *textuality* of the argument («palabras textuales», «representaciones textuales») before undercutting the reliance on textuality by recourse to paralogism: Góngora's apparent emptiness in the *Soledades* is a ruse by which to portray the hellish excess of signification. The conclusion to be reached by this stratagem is clear and itself relies on the same paralogism: Borges, in writing of excessive signification, signifies excessively himself. The result that we're obliged to admit that the relationship between what Borges says, and what he does, is equivocal.⁵⁷⁴ To this Borges makes no objection:

*Sabe que los fracasos perseverantes de la expresión, siempre que blasonen misterio, siempre que finja un método su locura, pueden componer nombradía. Ejemplo: Góngora. Ejemplo: todo escritor de nuestro tiempo, en alguna página.*⁵⁷⁵

'Perseverations of expression' here can't be disentangled from the psychological sense of useless response continuation after the initial stimulus has departed. Borges' father was a psychologist, conducting lectures straight out of William James' *Textbook of Psychology*, and so it retains its psychological usage.⁵⁷⁶ Thus, Góngora's compulsive repetitions (*el góngorismo*) can be seen as the transference of attributes between levels of discourse that lies at the heart of metaphor.

4.4.7 Metaphor's Two Insuperable Levels of Signification

Metaphor works at two levels; the textual and the meta-textual. The textual operation of metaphor is plain enough. As Borges had argued in 'Ultraísmo' metaphors are the atomic basis of the combination of images. However, these images occur at the level of textual reality; one is aware of a startling confrontation, but it only exists at the surface of the page. It can be forgotten. The meta-textual operation of metaphor, on the other hand, involves our ability to recognise the disjunction between the content of the text and its form of exposition. Góngora produces a catalogue of physical description, not to create an impression of verisimilitude, but to alert us to the fact that this catalogue is itself unnatural. The disjuncture makes an impact because the text breaks the bounds of its own confined universe and invades our own. In frustrating our expectations it brings our attention beyond the page and settles it, bewilderingly, on ordinary life.⁵⁷⁷

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 4.5

By allowing for the reader's participation in textual production, Borges presages post-structuralism's death of the author thesis. But by anchoring his reception ethic in the bedrock of transferred cultural imagery, he connects with structuralism. Borges bases his theory of post-poetics on a radical critique of the writerly text: the text that is too self-conscious alienates its audience, removing itself from the possibility of imagic incorporation. We simply cannot understand what we cannot believe in the first place. Borges' critique of Don Quijote as both self-parody (alienating work of art), and allegory (self-consciously symbolic, and therefore equally alienating), problematises structuralism's universal ideal, on one hand and post-structuralism's particularising mission on the other.

4.5 Post poetics

Can metaphor operate on the page, as it were, and still have a lasting effect? The *kenningar* are the 'honour of metaphysics, its remuneration and its source.'⁵⁷⁸ To think of a metaphor involving a peculiarly horrific image is to implant it within not only our textual consciousness, but within the ordinary waking world. Disjuncture operates at the textual level, but it always refers to the world beyond itself.⁵⁷⁹ The power of metaphor springs not, therefore, from its fantastic quality, but from its realistic possibilities. However, metaphor need not always be horrific, the pathology of the image is merely an interesting case for illustration:

*El hecho puede tal vez resolverse así. Las cosas (pienso) no son intrínsecamente poéticas; para ascenderlas a poesía, es preciso que los vinculemos a nuestro vivir, que nos acostumbremos a pensarlas con devoción.*⁵⁸⁰

Our part hasn't been reduced to the level of mere interpreter of facts in the text, but has been elevated to that of active collaborator in the production of poetic meaning. Poetry only exists when two factors are in simultaneous operation: the linking of our lives to the art work, and the effort of the reader to imbue the art work with an affective potential. If this reciprocity is not an ordinary feature of daily life it can only be because the public reception of literature has been divided between categories of the poetic and the non-poetic. The poetic obtains to the usual features of high-art: a certain preciousness, restraint, life with all the vigour civilised out of it. The non-poetic, exploited as a living resource, is conversational in the best sense, charged with the materiality of its expression:

*Su voz es la metáfora, consorcio de palabras ilustres. (Creo de veras que la metáfora no es poética; es más bien pospoética, literaria, y requiere un estado de poesía, ya formadísimo.*⁵⁸¹

4.5.1 The Literary's Failed Game

Borges makes the distinction between the 'poetic' and the 'literary' on the basis of the distinction between form and content already described. A 'poetic' text like Góngora's *Soledades* can be considered

empty even though it's packed to the brim with detailed description.⁵⁸² This is poetry, in Croce's words, that's become 'superior to itself' and therefore loses its value as a conceptual prompt.⁵⁸³ On the other hand a few words in a relatively minor English author's reminiscences of childhood can have a startling effect.⁵⁸⁴ This effect derives from the radical conjunction of dissimilar images, but this conjunction can only take place with poetic effect within an already formalised environment. Once we know a text is "poetry", and the poetic text forms part of a genre with its own special rules, we can assimilate any textual item to the general requirement of being poetry. The only criteria for aesthetic judgement remaining are qualitative; poetry is either good or bad depending on the success with which its metaphors are intermeshed. The "literary" on the other hand is prosaic because it is foregrounded in everyday experience. To discover metaphor in the literary is to *fail* to play the categorical game. That's why metaphor is post-poetic; its effects predate the artificial codes of poetry as high-art and rely on the power of functional speech. If it's "seen" as poetic this is only because the "poetry" which followed it out of lived and prehistoric experience is being in turn seen by eyes dimmed to the possibility of an intrinsic poetry within ordinary language.

Borges maintained throughout his life ordinary language is intrinsically metaphoric, and because of this the simplest writing was capable of embodying profound insights. This is the main thought behind his *Ultraísta* manifesto of 1921 and encapsulates the new movement's chief motivation. Borges ostensibly quotes Remy de Gourmont: «En el estado actual de las lenguas europeas, casi todas las palabras son metáforas».⁵⁸⁵ At the age of eighty in a collection of interviews he'd make the same claim, reconfirming the insight through Emerson's quip that language is but fossil poetry.⁵⁸⁶ Why else, he asks, would we think of bridge-builders when we hear the word *pontifex*, of belts and *zones*, or of goats and *tragedy*?⁵⁸⁷

4.5.2 Metaphor's Syntagmatic Residua

Borges also indicates the residual activity of metaphor. In Spanish the question «¿Piensa usted que ese hombre sirva para nada?» (literally 'Do you think this man is good for nothing?') relies on the equivocation between the negative sense of «nada» (nothing) and its positive colouration through an ironic modalisation. Having lost its prefixal substantive «cosa» (something) in the primitive phrase «cosa

nada», its positive value survives and is reconfirmed by its apophasis. Borges notes other examples, each of which turn on implied positive signification. Reasoning that a sentence is a means by which meaning is produced through a chain of symbolic tokens, each of which has a positive value (i.e. it signifies a *thing* in the world) he determines that the signification of negation arose by the twin processes of verbal attenuation (the «*cosa nada*» example) and «inercia gramatical».⁵⁸⁸ The syntactical momentum of positive signification will have carried through into forms of speech where negation is indicated:

*Precisamente, esta difícil sustantivación del no ser, la palabra Nada, parece haber sido inventada por la causalidad, por inercia gramatical, no por empeño de corporificar abstracciones.*⁵⁸⁹

Whether Borges has a logically valid argument or not is not at issue at this point.⁵⁹⁰ For the moment all that is necessary is to give an explanation of the progress of his reasoning. Borges' central idea is that language is composed of primitive terms (words) each of which has a positive value. When these terms are in contact the sense from one travels to the next one like the bumping electrons in an electricity cable. In other words they stand in a series of directly *causal relations*. A sentence is therefore a causal chain, the smallest link of which is metaphor. We make sense of our lives through symbolic means, through the regular conjunction of words. These conjunctions aren't arbitrary in the present, but have been assigned to us by the conventions of grammar and usage into which we are born. Because metaphor is a combination of orthodox meanings it passes from the privileged realm of poetry to ordinary speech and remains there unnoticed. As Borges remarks, the *kenningar*, once so magically infused with poetic meaning, have devolved into clichés, lyrical adornments rather than incantations. The task of the *Ultraísta* is to re-infuse language with its primitive wonder by untangling these knotted words. Metaphors aren't simple, they become clichés only through inattention.

Borges enlarges his argument to more complex textual structures in a discussion of Don Quijote in 'La conducta novelística de Cervantes'. Not merely the character the title names in Cervantes' novel, but Don Quijote as an encryption of causal potential.⁵⁹¹

4.5.3 The Causal Potential of Allegory

Borges begins by dismissing two then popular views of the work as allegorical and parodic. The first takes its inspiration from biblical scholarship. Just as Christians recognise the division of the Old and New testaments of the Bible as a division between the preparation for and the presentation of the accomplishments of Jesus Christ, so too Parts One and Two of *Don Quijote* were supposed to represent the journey from ingenuous innocence to practical worldliness: «la siempre desengañada generosidad y la de lo práctico». ⁵⁹² The argument rests on allegory, but the allegory itself rests on the assumption allegory is possible in the first place. How can a text represent real life except by the arbitrary assignment of meanings? If the meanings are arbitrary then the *interpretation* of allegory is equally so, and we are free to dismiss it. Allegory is intrinsically sympathetic, it transfers human meaning to the art work by means of an arbitrary identification between the real (non-textual) world and its supposedly textual counterpart.

The second view of the work as a mere parody of the knightly romance is dealt with as a recourse to metatheoretical argument: *El ingenioso hidalgo* is an interpretation of *Amadis de Gaula* and the rest of the genre of heroic romance. It therefore interprets it, as critiques of the parody serve to interpret it in turn, and so on. Borges dismisses this view on the grounds that critique partakes of parody by virtue of its reproductive function: parody is after all basically *reproduction* of the original art work to achieve a certain effect:

Además, ni lo paródico ni lo alegórico son valederas manifestaciones de arte: lo primero no es otra cosa que el revés de otra cosa y ésta le hace tanta falta para existir, como la luz y el cuerpo a la sombra; lo último es una categoría gramatical más que literaria, una pseudo humanización de voces abstractas por medio de mayúsculas. ⁵⁹³

Just as the dubbed image displaces its original and robs the audience of an authentic experience, parody and allegory rob us of an interpretation arrived at through their own efforts. *Don Quijote* is a parody, therefore it's inferior to its original. *Don Quijote* is an allegory, therefore we need not read it for itself, but only for what it can be said to represent. Borges is highly antagonistic to both views. For him the

goal of reading is to arrive at a conclusion the author has painstakingly signposted. We are momentarily disempowered to create meaning to hear the author's voice. What we witness in *Don Quijote* is a marvellous and autonomous unfolding of personality:

*Imperturbable, como quien no quiere la cosa, lo levanta a semidiós en nuestra consciencia, a fuerza de sumarias relaciones de su virtud y de encarnizadas malandanzas, calumnias, postergaciones, incapacidades, soledades y cobardías.*⁵⁹⁴

For Borges the character of Don Quijote achieves life beyond the page through his isolation as a textual object. *Don Quijote* is a presence whose self-referentiality never descends to self-parody. Because of this, knowing Borges' view on parody, it follows he functions as an authentic presence. Unlike Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet, who, feigning madness, solves a moral problem intellectually,⁵⁹⁵ or Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, whose perpetual self-awareness makes him into an existential clock-watcher, Don Quijote lives in the grip of a madness he does not understand as such, and so fails to respond to it as outside his being. For Don Quijote chivalry is all the world's way of doing things.⁵⁹⁶ In naturalising madness the Knight of the Mournful Countenance lives an existence determined not by self-reflection, but by a code of ethical conduct expressed in positive emotion and feeling. Unlike the procrastinating Hamlet or the narcissistic Raskolnikov (it could be argued these heroes are paradigms of emotional negativity, their whole being is expressed through the non-performance of ritual acts, i.e. revenge in the first case and confession in the second) Don Quijote obeys a 'lucid and limited' progress whose details are prophetic in relation to the textual universe informing it, the knightly romance as a code of conduct.⁵⁹⁷

CHAPTER FIVE

World as Text: Grammar of the Eternal Labyrinth

The previous chapter showed how characters in the text may be read as symbolic complexes, and how this complex relationship is corrosive to a view of the subject in literature as the embodiment of an enduring psychological personality.⁵⁹⁸ Psychological autonomy can't account for the variety of views of the subject the text offers, and indeed makes necessary, if its symbolic regimen is to be admitted. We saw that in Borges the text obeys regulation by means of intermittent punctuations of the reading-surface by the recurrence of key images operating by the magic causality of homoeopathsia and sympathetic association. The task of the author is to produce a complex of symbolic associations allowing the characters in a text to live their own lives as incorporations of the reader's own symbolic framework. In this way *the reader* and *the read* experience organic satisfaction at the surface of the page. We become conscious participants in the text, exercising affective assent to the conditions that pertain there. This assent operates simultaneously through two strategies: suspension of disbelief, and what I have been referring to as Radical Objective Identification (ROI), where the primitive image is recognised both as an atomic constituent of the symbolic complex to which it belongs, and also as an autonomous and interchangeable element of other symbolic complexes in other texts. The task of the present chapter is to further refine this notion of symbolic interchangeability, reading it not only within the text, but as a feature of the genre where the text resides. Just as symbolic complexes differ within the text, so texts differ within genre. The text therefore can be seen as the nexus of a range of meta-symbolic operations troubling the surface of genre. A reading of metaphor and analogy is again fundamental to such an inquiry, and is here undertaken through a critique of rhetorical strategies in Saussure and Derrida.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 5.1

Although Borges' literary theory flirts with some of the presuppositions of structuralism and post-structuralism, his reliance on the reader's compliant receptivity removes him from the postmodern political programme. Borges' reception ethic, despite attempts to see it as otherwise, is a paean to control and authorial power. Language, as a collection of lexical resources, is stable enough to underwrite the transcription of cognitive and cultural values, values which are cast into high relief by the reader's assimilation of ontologically perplexing Metaphors.

5.1 Agents of destiny: *Universal History* as syntactical archetype

The Borges narrative presents a fundamental problem. Does it exist trans-thematically as structure-within-structure or generically as structure-in-itself? The question is one not solely of dichotomy, nor even of dualism, but of a plurality of explanatory accounts all of which shed light on the subject. This plurality is an antidote, in Geoffrey Hartman's phrase, to seeing narrative as a structure that can be used in an 'incidental' way, as though as a referent safely removed from the action.⁵⁹⁹ Narratology presents a wide range of responses to the characterisation of narrative. However, all these accounts derive their power of description from that principle which Borges portrays in 'La metáfora'. To even see a structure is to intuit an analogical relation, in this case between the "structure" of written narrative, and "structure" as an arrangement of parts forming a functional unity. What relation can there possibly be, one is entitled to ask, between a collection of written symbols and an apartment block, except that in both the parts that make up the whole occur in a regularly recurring fashion, so that, if one wished to continue the "structure" as such all that would be required would be to continue the series of operations that had led to this point.⁶⁰⁰

5.1.1 *Resource Logistics of Metaphor*

On the preceding example a great discrepancy presents itself between physical engineering and narrative construction. While the parts going to make up the apartment block might occur in a series that repeats what has gone before, the parts going to make up narrative also obey the rule of repetition. The twenty-six letters of the English alphabet *could* be arranged in an infinitely large number of letter combinations. However, they only occur as a fairly easily defined set as 'that number of combinations found in the most extensive English lexicon' currently known as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. The number of lexical combinations is known, and constitutes only a few million. One might expect the number of lexical combinations, or syntagms, to obey an ever decreasing rule, but this is certainly not the case: the infinity of possible syntagms is equal to the infinity of possible letter combinations. Will the number of narratives composed from the syntagms be equally vast? Certainly not. Although large, and even strictly uncountable since new arrivals

appear constantly, the number of narratives making up the set known as 'the English narrative' occupies only a tiny section of that body of work that includes scientific and technical literature, manuals of procedure, libretti, poetry, history, song-lyrics, encyclopaedias, road-signs and advertising bill-boards, graffiti, etc. or what might be loosely termed the possible classes of combinations of the English language. But, as every student of literature knows full well, the class of narratives dealt with in orthodox theory is relatively small and usually confined to the genres of drama, poetry, the novel and the short-story, all of which provide sub-genres. Just as the apartment block may be continued only by a repetition of the principles of organisation from which it's initially derived, so too genre can only be continued by a repetition of the formal principles of organisation from which it too is originally derived. Otherwise it becomes unfamiliar to genre and must either be discarded as an unsuccessful experiment, or incorporated within genre's paradigmatic series of relations. In short, the name of "structure" constitutes a circular argument whose analogical genesis has been for the moment forgotten.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 5.2

Yet, the orderliness of Borges' system betrays the underlying tensions that have provoked it. Metaphor is a notoriously unreliable tool, at any time its semantically explosive power may be turned against its author. Critiquing the insights of deconstruction, the Borgesian project is examined as a flawed attempt to control not only the reading space, but also Borges' own rhetoric of production.

5.2 *The Foundations of Analogy: Reading out of Derrida*

What does the act of reading require of the reader structurally? The Preface to *Of Grammatology* subtly unwinds the doxies of narrative:

*...the structure preface-text becomes open at both ends. The text has no stable identity, stable origin...each act of reading 'the text' is a preface to the next. The reading of a self-professed preface is no exception to this rule.*⁶⁰¹

In *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* Christopher Norris analyses Jacques Derrida's achievement as historically synthetic. Derrida, in the person of deconstruction, is seen as a culminating analytic inclination devoted to interrogating the very idea of literature as a closed system of meanings that can be read and understood by trained interpreters.⁶⁰² This is not to be, however, the destruction of structuralism, but its reinvigoration. For Norris Derrida's contribution to the structuralist's first assumption there is an 'orderly' system of relations that can be interrogated, is supposedly that of recuperation rather than antagonism:

*It would be wrong...to regard deconstruction as 'post-structuralist' in the sense of displacing or invalidating the structuralist project. Without that specific tension between 'practice' and 'promise' exemplified in structuralist thought, Derrida could hardly have broached the questions that animate his own writing. Deconstruction is a constant and vigilant reminder of what structuralism must be if it is to avoid the traps laid down by its seductive concepts of method.*⁶⁰³

The division between 'practice' and 'promise' is illuminating for a view of literary theoretics, even if it doesn't formally aid Norris' argument. The imposition of normative judgements about the correct view of such a many-headed project as structuralism or deconstruction ('it would be wrong...') and the polarising of two groups of writing called 'practice' and 'promise' which are formulated in terms of explicit opposition ('without that specific tension') creates the conditions upon which the argument must fail in its formal aspect: if 'structuralism' propounds an authorised reading, and Derrida disagrees, then he

must do so without himself imposing an authorised reading. However, since Derrida disagrees, he imposes, and thus acts as another authoriser.⁶⁰⁴ If Derrida is to evade the transcendental *tu quoque* of the sceptic attempting a refutation on the basis of inconsistency, he must do so with arguments centring on the synthetic aspect of expression, its ability to elicit new facts of experience not contained within the over-arching form of critical logicity.⁶⁰⁵ Derrida is seen as eluding large-scale architectural formulations by the reinvestigation of smaller generative principles like *différance*, metaphor, supplement, and repetition, and thus as focussing his deconstructionist energies in 'actively rehearsing' the point at which these names seek to show themselves as activities of inquiry rather than linguistically transparent indicative terms.⁶⁰⁶ The expression of meaningful utterances by speakers is never capable of absolute resolution to an ultimate canon of intelligibility. It's always possible we don't mean exactly what we say, or that the listener can interpret us exactly, since he or she has no access to our thoughts as they occur, nor we to theirs. Accessibility itself might function as the police force of meaning whose authority it is strictly unlawful (read ungrammatical, unintelligible, illogical) to question. This line of argument, stripped of its philosophical dress, is also plausible in terms of social linguistic interaction, both synchronically and diachronically, since speakers speak with different intentions, from different experiences, at different strata of specialisation, and at different times.⁶⁰⁷

5.2.1 *Recuperation and Revelation and Rhetoric*

In the history of literary criticism Norris sees Derrida's recuperative mission as based on certain operations that seek to re-foreground suppressed modalities of interpretation. The activity of deconstruction in broad terms consists of a rigorous questioning of the intentions of authors as evinced by their texts. Perversely logical, it's the marshalling of an armory of investigative techniques serving texts by reading them against their authors. Thus, the activity aims at being revelatory, but its chief ideological weapon is Derrida's conviction that it is the *rhetorical* function of texts, their apparent intent to persuade the reader, which disguises their inconsistencies even to their authors.

The notion of revelation, and its opposite, disguise, can only operate within a framework of psychological intentionality of a personal nature.

Rhetoric relies on the commonality of a psychological framework “operating” through efforts of the will, programmes of desire, intentionality, etc. Derrida can't escape from the prison house of desire. Rousseau can't have *intended* any other object than the privileging of speech over writing in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. Readers must assign the same purposeful desire to Rousseau they do to Derrida, or else risk Derrida's very existence as a deconstructionist.⁶⁰⁸ The question to ask when considering the claims of structuralism against the deconstructive programme is not, what did Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss, or Husserl, *manage to say*, but what did they *intend* to say. As far as intention goes, in its guise of grammatically ordered writing that accepts the propositional conventions of language, intention for Derrida remains the same as that of his targets of inquiry.⁶⁰⁹

Where can such a bald and bad-tempered assertion lead in a discussion of structuralism's view of description and analogy, and the relation of these views to post structuralism's radical questioning of structure as such? Derrida's attack is based on the assumption that there may be a non-paradoxical source for language as a regularly constituted system of spoken sounds. In Saussurian terms, but reversing his priorities, that *parole*, or the fact of speech, may be seen as having its final ‘presence’ in *langue*, or the total inscription of speech. Derrida claims that to think the problem is to arrive at unresolvable paradoxes of primacy that can only be explained in terms of historical and philosophical aphasia.⁶¹⁰ Where the attempt to communicate becomes articulate it becomes ‘writing’ as the inscription of presence *as though it did not exist before*. It loses its memory of itself in propounding the idea of originary linguistics. In opting for one or the other source (Saussure for *parole*, Derrida, ultimately, for *langue*) *différance*, as the investigation of the oppositional term (in Derrida's own strictly temporal formulation, and incidentally, as a principle Borges had already formulated as early as 1933)⁶¹¹ succumbs to its own deferral in terms of explanation. Writing here is not mere tyrannising, it cannot even exist in its own terms. To proclaim the rallying cry: *Il n'y a pas du texte* is to leave oneself open to the rejoinder *Pas même Derrida*.⁶¹²

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 5.3

Having struck the aporia of recursively self-referential writing, différance is examined as an interplay of unequal conceptual transactions. Although syntagmatic relations seem regular, their “regularity” interferes with their differential potentiality.

5.3 *The Strange Case of M. F. de Saussure*

Post-cards

No secret Derrida prefers the form of the distant dialogue to the insistent monologue. His theory of self-presence as an undisclosed indicability serving to name the world through gestures of description demands it. How else could the claims of self-presence (self=presence) be filtered through a deconstructive reading so as to evade the charge of falling prey to this very tendency? The logicity of scientific explanation works to produce a transparent text without the resources of metaphor. However, it can't escape, for Derrida at least, from its own metaphoric pre-transcriptions in the texts of philosophy, which by this time have come to adhere to its every word like clusters of ship-fast barnacles. As Norris shows, expression as the 'breath' or 'soul' of meaning, and language as the mere physical 'body' that it comes to animate, conceals the possibility that the lust for power that informs the naming functionality of indication may be already present in conceiving the relation itself.⁶¹³ But how is Derrida to turn the trick of persistent textual self-presence without becoming its victim himself? His tactic is to elude the claims power is waiting to make by emptying the name of *différance* of its indicative capacity and operating this remote-controlled vehicle behind the slide from *difference* to *deferral* (and back again).⁶¹⁴ If, as he reasons, in the case of Husserl's conception of the conditions by which the linguistic content of minds is mapped onto consciousness to give an image of meaning, Husserl's phenomenology relies on an immediacy that can be questioned, if it's the 'total and immediate access' - a claim physics and neurology both contradict - to thoughts that guarantees self-presence that can be shown as an impossibility, then Derrida's *différance* as an *activity of interrogation* insures itself under the Saussurian terms in which it's framed.⁶¹⁵

5.3.1 *Author-Presence - Getting Behind in the Payments*

What does the activity of *différance* require, and how is one to avoid the impassable paradoxes it throws into our path? After all, to claim the individual's mental content is unavailable on request, and therefore conclude that other reasons must be adduced for these puzzling sentences in Husserl, might be seen as the originary impulse

at one remove working through a Derrida as *author-presence* that can't bear to give up the concept called 'disclosure' and let it lie, as it were. Why should this 'system of interdependent terms' be unamenable to Husserl, but yet announce its availability to Derrida through an economy of defigured 'logic' relying on philosophy's so-called repression of writing? If deconstruction is 'an activity performed by texts which in the end have to acknowledge their own partial complicity with what they denounce,' and become in their own rigour of explication ones holding themselves 'provisionally open to further deconstruction of [their] own operative concepts,'⁶¹⁶ why should Derrida's texts be immune from deconstruction? The answer is, of course, they can't and Derrida never claims they should be. However, in applying a particular method to these frightened little scraps of writing, is it not also prudent to ask *by whose leave we act thus?* Or, to be more brutal, how can the notion of *différance* be thought otherwise?

In Saussure's famous text, a text composed after the event of writing,⁶¹⁷ presence and absence are characterised by their own absent presences:

*The syntagmatic relation is in praesentia. It is based on two or more terms that occur in an effective series. Against this, the associative relation unites terms in absentia in a potential mnemonic series.*⁶¹⁸

The doctrine of the effective series supposed to underwrite syntagmatic relations is infected by the relational dogma of association so completely one becomes impossible to conceptualise without the other. Does this then make the potential mnemonic series unavailable as such? To conceive of a 'potential' mnemonic is to bring it before consciousness, and thus render it actual rather than potential. On the other hand, to conceive of the effective series *in praesentia* is to momentarily neglect the relations that are supposed to be waiting in memory's bond-house, and so render them *semper in potentia*. Careful reading of this passage brings such difficulties into play one might suspect other motives for Saussure than explication. How, for instance, can *associative relations* be present when they depend on seriality as such? A series is a progressive and regular sequence of calculative operations already within the logical confines of a system so ordered to begin with. The series "1, 2, 3, 4, 5" is

usually continued by the addition of the previous ordinal plus “1”, just as the series of prime numbers is fixed by the addition of the subsequent prime. The letters “a”, “b”, “c”, “d” don’t form a series, since there is no generative rule for their relations. The letters of the alphabet aren’t a series, but an associative sequence. This might be merely a logical quirk were it not for the insight it provides into a bent in linguistics colouring it with a systematicity it does not actually possess.⁶¹⁹ Where Saussure posits a relation that is syntagmatic he does so on the basis of an unspoken sequentiality supposed to exist between terms usually found together. His example of architecture, where the architrave is supposed to suggest the columns that support it, regardless of whether we see them, illustrates what Hume calls a ‘lively expectation’ of seeing them again in such a conjunction rather than a relation.⁶²⁰ Why should the same rule of thumb not be applied to language? What relation is there between nouns and verbs, say, other than the lively expectation of those future conjunctions constituting grammatical writing? However, what of apparently ungrammatical utterances that constitute speech for Derrida’s purposes? Saussure begins to allow the arbitrariness of language in recognising that ‘in the syntagm there is no clear-cut boundary between the language fact, which is a sign of collective usage, and the fact that belongs to speaking and depends on individual freedom,’⁶²¹ but stops short of employing the notion of seriality at one remove from the shifting centres of his ‘constellations,’ as an economy of present absence Derrida will first sketch in his discussion of Heidegger’s *kreuzweise Durchstreichung*, or cross-wise striking-through, of terms in order to let one see them before their transcendental “meaning” has occluded their activity as deferring parts of speech.⁶²²

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 5.4

Condillac sees metaphor as the litmus test of our foundational prejudices. Yet, they need not involve us in psychological descriptively explanation. Metaphor, as the resurfacing of cognitively functional lexia, provides a non-psychologising theory of ideological association. As an escape from the chaotic recursivity of différance, Condillac's senso-conceptual inductivism - for all its obvious flaws - provides a confirmation of Borges' authorless poetics. But because this poetics relies on the figure of repetition, it also signals the need for an escape from the merely re-iterative trope of serialised narrative.

5.4 *The Even Stranger Case of M. Condillac*

No wonder Derrida devotes a book, albeit a short one,⁶²³ to Monsieur Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* when we find the following:

*§7. By tracing human error to the source here mentioned (the discovery of the combination of new expressions as metaphors, and thereby new knowledge) we reduce it to one single cause that we cannot honestly deny but it has had a considerable share in our judgements. Perhaps we might oblige even the most prejudiced philosopher to own that it has laid the first foundation of their systems: we need only to ask the question in a proper manner. And indeed if our passions are the occasion of error, it is because they abuse a vague principle, a metaphorical expression, or an equivocal term, to make applications from which we may deduce such opinions as flatter us.*⁶²⁴

Condillac's aim was to pursue Locke's scepticism about the theory of innate ideas to its logical conclusion: epistemology need not involve the psychologically genetic for its "foundation". Indeed, it requires nothing for its foundation at all.⁶²⁵ To speak of foundations is to alert us to the need for a reading into the general *phainai* of *nomoi* supporting the *physika meta* of meaning. Yet, something must always be said *firstly* - the business of metaphysics. Condillac's attempt aims at distancing an Aristotelian metaphysics of rationality from its empirical, Lockeian successor. Why, Condillac argues, settle for a science of the real resting entirely on metaphorical transcriptions from a "natural" world irredeemably inflected by those very metaphors we have forgotten, or have been using badly? Why not base one's metaphysics on empirical evidences that can be traced to other empirical evidences, and so on, and thus arrive at an extended chain of signification stretching "back" to an origin properly without origin. Derrida launches himself on the *re-source* with critical zeal. What can this division of metaphysics be but another oblivion of the gap between "good" and "bad" writing: the "good" being that of Monsieur Condillac's analytic method that will allow 'us to speak like nature' and

the “bad” that which has only let us perpetuate error by the application of ‘a metaphorical expression’.⁶²⁶ However, is this enough? Condillac proposes another bifurcation, this time from the empirical fork, in order to establish the good metaphysics in a prelinguistic Eden of sensation and reflection on sensation, thus leading to conjunctions of ideas and true reason. He lets the bad limb of metaphor, which can only serve to offer illusions of knowledge through vain recombinations of words giving rise to ideas, wither and die without noticing its disease is of a systemic quality. It has always already poisoned the main trunk from which the new branch shoots and divides, its disease is the disease of the entire tree whose cure is fruitless because it can never get under way.⁶²⁷

What has caused this terror of metaphor for the empirical Abbé, and how is one to avoid it? Derrida isolates two strategies for allaying his disquiet: the urge to *retrace* one’s sources (critique of Aristotle), and the desire to *supply* knowledge allowing explanation in a series.⁶²⁸ If we are to speak like nature we should do so as she herself speaks, in a strictly “organic” and “progressive” way, not as the result of reasoning from general phenomena to isolated examples. Derrida’s Condillac is committed to the purge from reason of its metaphorical impetus that arises as the result of ‘deficiency’, and which is evinced in instances of the ‘epistemological myths’ resupplying its negative economy of signification.⁶²⁹ This is negativity in its Saussurian dress, of course, since deficiency here operates for Derrida as a general principle allowing meaning its other existence as *signans modo*, or ‘signifying just now’ in the differential of apprehension.⁶³⁰

Condillac’s apprehensions spring from the idea that analogy (or rather the *urge* to analogise and thereby constantly, but never perfectly, supply the voracious appetite of meaning) is constantly led off-target by a persistently held theory of knowledge that can’t allow its practitioners to see the apparently natural relationships between concepts. Epistemology, as a series of myths concerning conceptual relationships that have departed from their original relatively simple and unrecomposed being as concepts present to consciousness (we should remember the famous sentient statue that could tell the difference between two flower’s perfumes on the basis they occurred at different times and with different qualities) is always ready to subvert the process of analogy with its historical lumber. Seeing the

past could only wreck the mission of reason, he champions Bacon's inductive method, believing him to have been uninfected by the mythology of knowledge, and sees in his long lists of instances a key to the practical application of analogy by comparison. Of course, what Condillac misses is that Bacon's method of induction by simple enumeration is as flawed as his own sensitive statue, since there is no way of coming to the point of comparison his method implies without the active holding of a general hypothesis not already included in the method. Where, for example, did Condillac's sensitive statue get the idea there could be difference between this flower and that one if it did not already have a memory of a past event (which it's deemed not to have, memory being a higher reasoning process that comes only *after* a certain number of different experiences), and how could it assign difference at all to the experiences without already possessing the ideas of identity and non-identity? ⁶³¹

5.4.1 *The Critique of Authorship*

Derrida focuses on these, and other, difficulties of Condillac's method to infer a general problem in the conceptualisation of analogy. Referring to the *Logic*, a textbook on the subject which Condillac wrote as the result of a commission from the government of Poland in 1780, the year of his death, and presumably therefore a mature reflection on the subject, he draws out the generative energy of analogy as a synthesising process based on the difference of degree: one part is the disunitive element that must be overcome by the effort of comparison, and the other is this effect of unity when applied to other objects. However, asks Derrida, how can it be there is disunity in the first place, or that there can be unity afterwards, without recourse to an initial comparison? Derrida finds it in Condillac's persistent reference to the biologic model of physics (which had become acceptable by this time through Descartes' demolition of Aristotle's vegetative soul, which meant biology could be shown as the interaction of relatively simple mechanical forces, and thus, in theory, acceptable for the empirical Condillac) ⁶³², which is seen as theoretically incompatible with the analytic method that proceeds through a rational calculus divorced from an analogy to the "natural" world. The disunity between the biological and the analytic is supposed for Derrida to signal an occlusion in Condillac's own conception of his programme, and thus to render the proposition of textual ungovernability amenable. However, even if 'Condillac

“himself” had not *laid down* the rule of this debate’⁶³³ there is still the question of whether or not his system is as self-divided as he supposes.

Derrida’s critique of analogy is based on the apparent limits of the power of authorship.⁶³⁴ On the surface this has a plausible social demonstration. Authorship is traditionally thought to consist of a unitary relationship between design and textual production: the author has something to say, and the text is its demonstration.⁶³⁵ On such a model an author’s linguistic competence is essential, as is that of the audience. Author and audience share a system of meanings allowing them to communicate seamlessly. The problem with such a model of communicative transparency comes in the observable fact of equivocation. The “meanings” of words change historically, allowing alternate readings that can’t be challenged on intentional grounds after their authors have departed. And the social model of language use has an epistemological dimension, wherein not only the meanings of individual words are equivocal, but the larger meanings they may convey as well. This leads to substantial qualitative shifts of communicative acceptability, or epistemic mutation. Derrida’s ‘lever of disorganisation’ describes a logical inconsistency in Condillac’s separation of the unacceptable metaphysics of ‘genesis’ and its acceptable successor ‘calculus’ - not in a chaotic way, but with predictable and determined effects.⁶³⁶

How is the lever to be applied, and where shall lie its divisive fulcrum? Derrida reads the objections of a contemporary, Maine de Biran, in order to locate the shifting point of equilibrium, and arrives at confirmation of the double-theory theory.⁶³⁷ In a text already rich enough in mechanical, chemical, and organisational metaphors to guarantee it a putative existence in Condillac’s own thought (Derrida writes of ‘dissolving,’ the systems’ ‘working’ and the forming of a ‘routine’),⁶³⁸ he comes to the conclusion that by reading Condillac against the ground of his critic, one may discern an economy of *repetition* that constitutes reading as the ground of analogy.⁶³⁹

Whether Main de Biran finds a duplicity of theories, and Condillac a contradiction, is not as important for Derrida as the fact *something is found at all*. What could be the basis for this discovery except the idea that one thing (Condillac’s writing) might be compared with some

other thing (Maine de Biran's counter-writing) in a repetition of the idea itself ("There is/not innateness")? As he points out,

[I]n Condillac as in Biran (and in the whole textual field indicated by these names), the constant recourse to a value of repetition - whose law and possibility are never questioned - jumbles the opposition activity/passivity, without the rule of this indecision ever coming to conception [au concept]. No doubt the limit here is not a concept but, with regard to the structure of repetition, the concept.⁶⁴⁰

5.4.2 Repetition is to Perpetuation as Epistemology is to...?

Does Derrida attempt to fall outside the tyranny of repetition? Why should he, when its mere critique constitutes, in his terms, a perpetuation? The longing to say something "new" of Condillac, (as with his critics, which included Rousseau, in that this "new" was either wrong, or mad) is his intention, but its manner constitutes a shifting from Condillac's physicalities to the metaphors employed by the couple "Condillac/Contra-Condillac". One always opposes an author from a ground in which the viscera of signification is overlooked.⁶⁴¹

Analogy, the arbitrary pairing of concepts, not designed to elicit something beyond the reach of either but always serving to distance meaning anyway, operates in Derrida's reinscription of an 'Introduction to *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* - frivolity itself' to capture the non-distinctions which Condillac in his *Dictionnaire des Synonymes* makes central to an epistemology of conceptual identity working against the play of analytics in the *Essay*.⁶⁴²

For Condillac identical propositions consist in those where the subject of an assertion contains its predicate. Thus, when Condillac in *De l'art de raisonner* states, 'The statement *a whole is greater than one of its parts* is still an identical proposition, for it states a whole is greater than what is not as great as itself'⁶⁴³ he means the predicate a *part* is implicit in the *whole* in which it occurs. The logic is circular, since on Condillac's account there is no way to make any subject statement that may *not* be considered to imply its predicate.⁶⁴⁴ On such a reading it's difficult to see how the analytic process which Condillac proposes can begin, since it only reveals the pre-existent, but disguised, contents of the concepts being investigated.⁶⁴⁵

The task for Derrida is not, however, to perpetuate Condillac's circular logic. It is instead to make the circularity so obvious it becomes visible

in its relation to the text containing it, and the texts trying to counter it, including Derrida's own, so the relationships revealed allow a glimpse of analogy as the producer of an excess of signification. Condillac recognised this side effect of metaphor (analogy's condensed offspring) as the *frivolity* that exists as the recognition of excess as *uselessness*. To define frivolity as such in the *Dictionnaire* alerts Derrida to the possibility that where Condillac places such a historical burden on metaphor as 'a vague principle' in the *Essay* he does so to evade the responsibilities that the production of excess might bring. To defer the conclusion that his own work too might fall within the orbit of the metaphorical habit of mind Condillac is determined to employ the "circular" arguments of the *Dictionnaire* in his *Langue des calculs*, saying of excess, *difference*, *remainder*:

*Let us recall that we can go only from the known to the unknown. Now, how can we go from one to the other? We can because the unknown is found in the known, and it is only there because it's the same thing.*⁶⁴⁶

However, the unruly supplement (*suppléer*) will not be silenced. Even though the analytic method, as a means of breaking down or 'decompounding' a complex whole into simpler parts is the only true way of knowledge, Condillac is committed to acknowledge that his own determinations on metaphysics have not been brought to his attention by the method itself, but by an unexplained intuition:

*I had scarce discovered the unsafe paths they (the metaphysicians) had trod, when I thought I had hit upon the only and sure way of arriving at the truth. It seemed to me that we might reason in metaphysics and in morals with as great exactness as in geometry.*⁶⁴⁷

Geometry, as a metaphor for systematic relations, can't suggest itself to him as such, since that would automatically lead to the conclusion that a sure science could only have supplied a signification outside itself (the relations of ideas as a metaphor for the relations of geometry) by some analogy in order for Condillac to arrive at his foundational insight. What Derrida calls desire, which is the unspeakable motive of Condillac's sensitive statue (unspeakable because it contradicts sensation's existence as anything but a passive faculty, unspeakable also because it undercuts the circular logic of his

analytics: why seek to analyse “reality” when the old epistemological myths are sufficient?) is only dealt with by Condillac *after the fact*. In the *Traité des sensations* he only notes it as the effect of being ‘deprived of a thing you judge necessary’ which leaves the question open as to whether you always had this thing and then notice its absence, or whether your *judgement* of its necessity is the chief element leading to ‘un-easiness or disquietude’.⁶⁴⁸ This distinction works as much against an “analytic” Condillac, as much it does against a “scientific” Derrida, if such a reading were possible: both are concerned with the origination of knowledge, both have a theoretical device that may help them achieve their aim; analysis for Condillac, archaeology for Derrida. There is a lesson to be learned from the search for origins that reveals origins as the activity that they portray, rather than something *avant la lettre*.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 5.5

Borges might have escaped from the prison-house of symbolic serialisation by recourse to a poetics of generic re-incorporation. The causal magic that allows his structures to be seen in isolated fictions should, if his project for the creation of an autonomous repertoire of emblems is to be realised, provide a mechanism for their progressive accumulation. I use Saussure's semiotic "Play with a Cast of Three" to describe this mechanism. Because language invents new forms for itself constantly, but does not immediately displace its predecessors, new semantic incorporation always involves a significant historical lag in which we can determine its most probable semiotic cleavage-planes.

5.5 Borges (after deferral?): a Saussurean model of Metaphor.

La métaphore - what can it divulge for Borges allowing it to be read inside and outside structuralism's dialogue with itself? It hardly seems worth the effort to locate frivolity as the spoken sign of disguised excess (a name that goes by a variety of tactical codewords: uselessness, futility, chance, the unimportant) but the war on *parole*, a real glottomachy, is pressed into the fray through the operation of principles in Derrida that parody their effects in Saussure, Condillac, Rousseau Inc. Excess is in itself parodic, since it places itself eternally at one remove from the effect it describes. If there is always an excess of signification, and it's impossible to argue for a uniformity of sense either socially or linguistically, the excess of excess must inevitably spill out and go somewhere. The famous 'constellations' of Saussure have their centres nowhere and their peripheries everywhere.⁶⁴⁹ The 'syntagmatic solidarities'⁶⁵⁰ are useful as markers of traditions waiting to die, irrevocably disrupted by perverse and wilful application. How can Saussure not have seen that his system was split between the economies of repression and liberation? The particular words sitting uneasily at the centres of their constellations are allowed a spoken freedom at one point that crashes into the iron barrier of *langue* at the next:

*That phonetic evolution is a disturbing force is now obvious. Wherever it does not create alternations, it helps loosen the grammatical bonds between words; the total number of forms is uselessly increased.*⁶⁵¹

5.5.1 Tea Kettle Creationism

The matter of differences in language may boil down to this, but the boiling is surely up, not down.⁶⁵² Saussure's reductionist tendency is at variance with the implications of his theory, language may not be reduced (*réduite*) to an essential liquor where the grammatical bonds are being loosed (*luoein*) by phonetic evolution. Writing may not provide a means of entry, since *graphisme* is always already a reaction to, and therefore an effect of, *parole*. To institute a régime of signification is to participate in speaking the rules that depart and dissolve as soon as they're uttered. How is one to stop the process for the attempt at description? How is one to enter the whirling mass? Even Derrida's *différance* is trapped within the phenomenon it

attempts to describe: one can't distinguish what will not remain still, one can't defer what has already slipped by. To speak, even ironically, of 'an indicative stratum' and 'an expressive core' of language is to locate speech, not to mention writing, at the parallel intersections of signification's supposed laminality.⁶⁵³ Language is at the *bas-cœur* of its own mythological process.

Borges sees the problem in his characterisation of a history of metaphor that is *waiting* to be written, one that can't allow the «frialdad íntima» or «poco ingeniosa ingeniosidad» of Croce to capture its contradictions.⁶⁵⁴ The analogous process Aristotle sets at the heart of his definition, one relying on the dissimilitude between things, is contrasted with metaphors of similarity pertaining to the transferred association of the symbolic object. To refer to death in the Blues as the old rocking-chair, for example, is to transpose the physical resemblance between sleep and death. David 'goes to sleep with his fathers' as one goes to sleep in a rocker. The difference is *that there is no difference* in associative metaphors between the aspects of individuals that aren't noticed by onlookers. This is in contradistinction to the dissociative form in Aristotle that can only operate arbitrarily *after* the 'intuition of an analogy' has been brought to one's attention.⁶⁵⁵

5.5.2 *Borges and the Human Element*

It seems odd to put the description of this distinction in a percipient relation and talk about "aspects of individuals", but metaphor is a social fact as much as a linguistic one. This is certainly the case in Aristotle's definition, as it is with Borges' examples of two kinds of metaphoric relation. Earlier I suggested Borges is able to introduce novelty into his work by the recombination of pre-existent elements, and by attempting to show it's the *root* «raíz» of metaphor that is most important for an appreciation of the figure, he seeks to locate the reader's attention away from metaphor's effects to its causal strategy. The history of metaphor that Borges assures us may be written one day, along with his histories of eternity and infamy, should be read as provocations rather than explanations.⁶⁵⁶ The associative and dissociative metaphors he parallels in 'La metáfora' allow one to interrogate analogy along the axes of physical similarity and the linguistic arbitrariness that Saussure describes, but applied to other phenomena. For Saussure analogy is the combination of existing

phonetic features with a verbal root to produce new forms along the lines of these other previous forms. The process is 'paraplastic' in that the new form is constructed by an imitation of the old forms, or a distinctive feature in them, not 'metaplastic' in that it springs into life through a mysterious hybridisation. Saussure describes analogy as 'a play with a cast of three: (1) the traditional, legitimate heir; (2) the rival; and (3) a collective character made up of the forms that created the rival.'⁶⁵⁷ The analogy between the rival form and those elements that make up its collective character is established through the grafting of the distinctive feature of the collective onto the heir to make the rival. Because this process involves both forms existing side by side it appears obvious one (the heir) looks out of place and it becomes increasingly difficult to employ it without the appearance of inconsistency. Under the claims of the rival it atrophies and drops out of view over time. Thus, language invents new forms, but does not displace old ones immediately.

5.5.3 *Where There's a Will...*

The application of this principle to analogy in Borges involves the recognition of its three elements transferred to a larger linguistic compass. The "traditional heir" becomes a body of work existing as the raw material for metaphoric transformation, "the rival" is the work in progress, and the "collective character made up of the forms that create the rival" is that distinctive feature that the "traditional heir" has in common. Thus, 'La metáfora', an essay on the nature of metaphor, draws on a number of works where the device is used (the Blues, the *Old Testament*, the *Iliad*, *Orlando Furioso*, etc.) which constitute the heirs to this new rival, 'La metáfora', and the distinctions Borges makes between these heirs is based on two special features, their dissociative and associative potential.⁶⁵⁸ The operation of analogy therefore, for this revised Saussurean model, comes not as the arbitrary and metaplastic conjunction of descriptions, but their paraplastically submerged imitation, an imitation that has lost the ability to recognise itself through the atrophy of its heir.⁶⁵⁹ Borges may write about metaphor mysteriously, as though the gulf between associative and dissociative forms was unbridgeable, but the act of analogy that produces metaphor itself occurs as he writes this very challenge to their exposition. On this model there is no true 'root' of metaphor, merely the continuation of metaphor through the

misrecognition of the collectivity from which it's about to take its already present form.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 5.6

Using Saussure's theory of Generic Incorporation, and Borges' theory of metaphorical dynamism, I propose that the most likely way that the Borgesian project can avoid the backwaters of eternal symbolic recirculation is to realise, and reconcile himself to, the social dimension of his idealist reception ethic. Language is a social act, rather than a sacred pact. Saussure's tri-partite model of Generic Incorporation, either at the level of metaphor, or at that of the juxtaposition of entire narrative structures, allows us to include generic misrecognition as a dynamic principle for narrative construction

5.6 *The différance difference*

How close is such an interpretation of Borges under the sign, so to speak, of Saussure's generative model of metaphoricity to Derrida's investigations of *différance*? In approaching the question it's necessary to distinguish claims of similarity on two grounds: scope and effect. The scope of Derrida's approach is mainly limited to extrageneric considerations like motive and economy. His 'deconstruction' of the work of the structuralists singles out the psychological and the rhetorical in order to lead philosophical critiques of an implicitly "economic" nature. The Derridean project is a statement of the exchange relations of language.⁶⁶⁰ This is understandable when we consider the first duty of rhetoric is to persuade an audience of the speaker's point of view. How effective could such a project be if those Freudian strategies that literary theory now takes for granted were eliminated? *Différance* without liberation from the repressive moment of writing is literally, and unpuningly, unthinkable. The emotionalism of his critique gives Derrida a warmth that can't be denied, yet this warmth can only be expressed if the Nietzschean springs from which it surges is purified of the fascistic. Derrida would never dream, as one of his greatest influences does, of separating his audience into two opposing categories, a rigid division of the elect, represented by *Obermann* and Nietzsche, and the 'bungled and the botched' represented by the rest of us. However, Derrida is not sanitised Nietzsche, indeed his theory of a universal suffrage of signification is anti-Nietzschean in the best sense. Nietzsche's elect were to be the users of signification for the purposes of enslavement, since no fascistic government can exist without an efficient state propaganda. *Différance*, which disallows the authority of writing, is inimical to totalitarianism. However, Nietzsche's thought is multiform, as is Derrida's, and it would therefore be unwise to unduly privilege his social and political demarcations at the expense of the linguistic ones. As Gayatri Spivak points out, the Nietzsche Derrida isolates for investigation and emulation is not that of a semiotician's concentration camp, but the eternally self-questioning meditative thinker to whom 'self-diagnosis' has become crucial.⁶⁶¹

5.6.1 Derrida's Colonial Subjects

Self-diagnosis offers more than metaphorical asides. One of its most practical effects is the isolation of creative energies within a reflective strategy: writers become blind to explanations lying outside their rationale.⁶⁶² Thus, for Derrida structuralism must be opposed because it posits enduring and transferable formal strategies that contradict his liberational propaganda. The suspicion that deconstruction can't allow itself to speak as a dynamic but *stable* system of relations promulgated on apparently eternal laws of human behaviour is rigorously deferred since it upsets the free play of the signifier. Derrida's hypothetical subjects, the audience to whom his work is addressed, are always innocent of the designs worked upon them by the nasty structuralists, or trying to upset them like noble, but knowing, savages. However, they remain somehow purer than they ought to be since they have the dignity of ignorance that was supposed to make aboriginal peoples more dignified than the invader. One need only read his chapter on the "pollution" of the Brazilian Nambicuaras Indians by Lévi-Strauss' *graphique* experiment when he was a researcher at the University of São Paulo in the mid to later 1930s, to see it at work. Derrida becomes the anthropologist's eager accomplice at one remove in his appeals to an audience that substitutes for the innocent savages about to be despoiled of their pristine orality. Of course, one can interpret his comments against Lévi-Strauss and his distrust of writing ironically, but this only leads to the conclusion Derrida's deconstruction is free of moral imperative, which is quite untenable, although moral neutralism is a logical outcome of his philosophy: Derrida has written, and we have entered into, an exclusive and primary contract with the author, since one can only deconstruct what one has read, and this is always a reading according to the linguistic norms of society. To open the book is to agree to be bound by it in a moment before *différance* can be thought, even if one is forewarned.⁶⁶³

5.6.2 The Unbearable Lightness of Being Derrida

Given Borges and Derrida are engaged in different projects, can their approaches to metaphor be easily compared? Derrida activates the exploration of metaphorical creation by a conscious imitation of the process under investigation. Alluding to the play of language by reproducing that very play, his exegesis of the sign becomes intelligible only through a participatory reading where the reader

consents to play. Because the element of “play” is vital for a participatory reading, both from the epistemological as well as the participatory angle, failing to play creates obstacles to the understanding that can always be critically accounted for from the point of the reading itself. To fall out of the game is to fail at the level of the knowledge that the text seeks to impart (the slogan ‘free play of the signifier’ becomes a mocking rejoinder to the epistemologically recalcitrant) as well as the level of its studious technicality. The advantage of such a stratagem is that the ground of inconsistency is difficult to maintain against Derrida’s nimbly rhetorical assaults and those who choose to attack are always obliged to adopt an equally agile repertoire of mannerism.⁶⁶⁴ To take one obvious example this is certainly the case with Paul de Man’s fastidious critique of Derrida’s reading of Rousseau.⁶⁶⁵ The attack can never dethrone its target since it reinforces Derrida’s fundamental thesis of the existence of a wayward textual vitality *as such* that undermines orthodox reading. Derrida’s critics arrive only to fulfil what they challenge.

5.6.3 Misrecognising Analogy

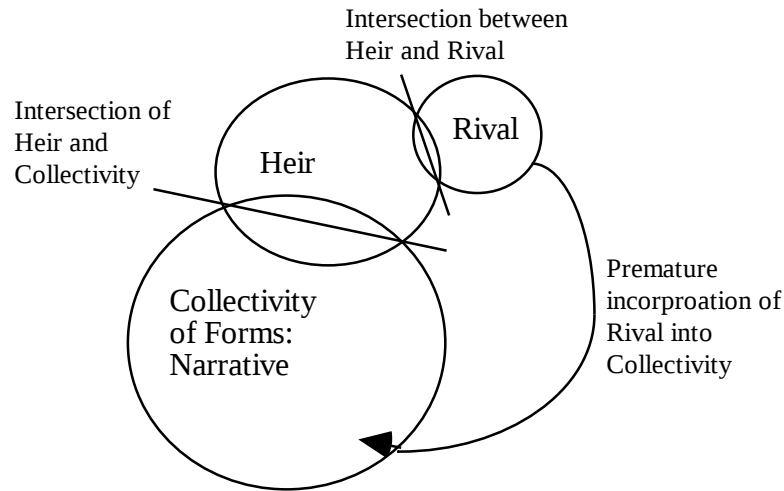
This is patently not the case with Borges. Borges the craftsman, Borges the mathematician, seldom gives into the temptation of rhetoric, unless it's that minimal rhetoric of the absent and passive vocality that assigns the reader to the position of spectator. The declarative figures: 'In Asia Minor or Alexandria...', 'Under the notorious influence of Chesterton...', 'I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia' radically foreclose the option of participation within the text.⁶⁶⁶ One is located at the beginning of a tale in the respectful pose of listener. Yet, no one will deny the interconnectivity of Borges' narratives. How can it be then that Borges' stories with these instances of closure, which don't invite us into the text, except as mute witness, can be said to have an intra-narrative play at all, especially when they're compared to the works of an author like Derrida? They don't, nor do they need to, since this is not Borges' aim.⁶⁶⁷ The idealist Borges who claims that, '...books only exist when they are being read and when they are being remembered'⁶⁶⁸ is already placing narrative out of the reach of the pernicious corrosions of its internality.⁶⁶⁹ Books are separable instances of narrative, not the phenomenon itself. If this were not the case, we'd have nothing but one big book called "narrative" encompassing all future instances of expression. Such an interpretation can't easily be imposed on Borges, who has always maintained the identity of authored works of fiction, even when this identity is fictional:⁶⁷⁰

*Don Quixote is perhaps one of the finest books ever written. Not because of the plot - the plot is flimsy, the episodes go nowhere - but the man, Alonso Quijano, who dreamt himself into Don Quixote is perhaps one of our best friends. At least he is my best friend. Creating a friend for the many generations to come is a feat which could hardly be equalled. And Cervantes has done that.*⁶⁷¹

However, if Borges maintains this separability of narrative, and even the personification of authors, how can one view his own *œuvre* in these self-sufficient terms? The *fictions* interfere incestuously, characters arrive and depart from texts like commuters disembarking from the interurban shuttle. Surely Borges has not written a series of tales, but one immensely complex work of literature with interchangeable parts? To make a little sense of the apparent

contradiction let us graphically depict Saussure's tripartite model of analogy:

Diagram 8: Analogic misrecognition



It's important to note this is not a model of psychological function in narrative, but a model of the function of analogy in the fictive reception environment. Thus, misrecognition, although nominatively borrowed from Freudian analysis, occurs as a wider literary activity beyond the reach of individual subjects. Having made this distinction clear one can embark on an interpretation of analogy from a mechanistic point of view more in line with Borges' thought.

Two points of intersection can be seen in diagram 8: Narrative/Heir and Heir/Rival. For the time being it's not necessary to delve into these, their place in the model will be examined in finer detail in the subsequent chapter once the broad outlines have been sketched. For the present it's only necessary to appraise the merits of a model of analogy operating through a basic misrecognition of its own resources in narrative to posit the "new" as though it really were new.

In the Saussurean model of the play with a cast of three the Rival usurps the Heir and returns to the collectivity of language from which it has, presumably, risen. It becomes orthodox, "the way things are

meant to be". At the level of single terms the conventionalised Rival is subsumed within its lexical base as though it had never existed, since it's hardly ever recorded except as an "oddity":

*The first linguists did not understand the nature of the phenomenon of analogy, which they called "false analogy." They thought that in inventing honor, Latin "had made a mistake" concerning the prototype honos. For them, everything that deviated from the original state was an irregularity, a distortion of an ideal form.*⁶⁷²

The misrecognition of the Heir as the genuine form, which without the overwhelming attraction of the existent paradigm that is waiting to regularise it, would remain in view as a disruptive influence (it would continue not to "make sense" when read against the ground of the paradigmatic forms) constitutes an image of fictive misrecognition in Borges as a complex of relations. The Borgesian narrative takes from its resource-base of the collectivity of narrative what it needs for the construction of its own little exercise, and in doing so creates an Heir to narrative existing in two worlds: that of the narrative collectivity making up all of its nameable instances (the "world of literature"), and its newly developing sub-species, the Fiction.⁶⁷³ That the Fiction can only occupy the place of the Rival is evident from its readers' misrecognition of the fact it operates as a double-movement between the Heir and Collectivity. This is the reason the Borgesian Fiction (ficción), to give it a name that has been waiting for it all along, is mostly investigated as a small work of literature itself, as though it merely *continued* narrative without unsettling it. The question I have been investigating is not what Borges "means" to say in these assemblages, but under what conditions he is able to assume the position of saying anything at all.

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF SECTION 5.7

Borges' fictions are semiotically schismatic. Although Borges' poetics is based on a symbolically constitutive regimen, the effort to contain its internally dynamic elements undercuts the task. Magic causality may have begun as a strategy for explaining narrative formation, but it ends as a means of diagnosing conceptual autonomy. As such, but contrary to Borges' intent, magic causality can be seen as an active principle of narrative reincorporation that exceeds the parameters of its brief.

5.7 Borges and Authorial Intent: Two Modes of Recapitulatory Consciousness

Are texts always well-behaved, or does narrative sometimes express schismatic effects that can be read as analogues for the meta-fiction of authorial control?⁶⁷⁴ This unruliness can be read in terms of intent alone, but it can also be read in terms of *constitutive discrepancy* within texts. As such *constitutive discrepancy* reveals much about the effects of the author's attempt at discipline as a constitutive strategy.

It comes as no surprise the mature prose of Jorge Luis Borges is most usually described in terms of repetition effects.⁶⁷⁵ Naomi Lindstrom cites 'the now-famous repertory of symbolically meaningful tokens that recur in his stories: labyrinths, swords, coins and other small round objects, mirrors, moons, chessboards, masks, roses, maps, tigers, towers, books, and many others'.⁶⁷⁶ However, not only the author's collection of favourite symbolic tokens, but the author himself, recurs throughout his work. Is this repetition parodic, designed to garner the effects of idiomatic self-presence Borges appears to crave? Or is it arbitrary, even an act of narrative will that the texts themselves would like to refuse? Take for example Borges' reappearance, after an absence of forty-six years, in a prologue to his first collection of verse, *Fervor de Buenos Aires*:

*No he reescrito el libro. He mitigado sus excesos barrocos, he limado asperezas, he tachado sensiblerías y vaguedades y, en el decurso de esta labor a veces grata y otras veces incómoda, he sentido que aquel muchacho que en 1923 lo escribió ya era esencialmente -¿qué significa esencialmente? - el señor que ahora se resigna o corrige. Somos el mismo; los dos descreemos del fracaso y del éxito, de las escuelas literarias y de sus dogmas; los dos somos devotos de Schopenhauer, de Stevenson y de Whitman. Para mí, Fervor de Buenos Aires prefigura todo lo que haría después.*⁶⁷⁷

The word "essentially" «esencialmente» isn't rhetorical flourish, but presents difficulties for narrative reproduction of which Borges is keenly aware. In *Evaristo Carriego* he was to propose an elementary creative programme of resonant representation, founded on

«...recuerdos de recuerdos de otras recuerdos, cuyas mínimas desviaciones originales habrán oscuramente crecido, en cada nuevo ensayo».⁶⁷⁸ It might be noted with prognostic approbation Borges describes the programme in terms of the *ensayo*, which can mean the literary essay as well as an *attempt*, but at this early stage of his career he held no firm ideas about the course his career would take. Certainly the prose pieces that would later make his name bear traces of the genre, but to see the *ficción* as basically an essay that is trying to be a fictional narrative is to contradict Borges' own historical verdict:

*The real beginning of my career as a story writer starts with the series of sketches entitled Historia universal de la infamia (A Universal History of Infamy), which I contributed to the columns of Crítica in 1933 and 1934. The irony of this is that "Streetcorner Man" really was a story but that these sketches and several of the fictional pieces that followed them, and which very slowly led me to legitimate stories, were in the nature of hoaxes and pseudo-essays.*⁶⁷⁹

5.7.1 The Sequel as Antidote

What then is the essential nature of a Borges who self-consciously repudiates the stories of *Historia universal de la infamia* in the name of generic legitimacy, but returns to the form throughout his writing career? Borges renounces the 'hoaxes and pseudo-essays' but his renunciation reveals an underlying anxiety about the formal requirements of literature. *Streetcorner Man* too eventually failed to satisfy his expectations and ended up being described as "...stagy and mannered and the characters bogus" and regarded as a 'starting point' and a 'freak'.⁶⁸⁰ However, it's the nature of freaks to be unique and inimitable, a claim that is ontologically difficult to sustain when its response, in the form of 'Rosendo's Tale' is considered. In order to accomplish the tying-up of one of the original narrative's hanging thread, that of the mysterious departure of the last man to challenge the tale's victim Francisco Real to a knife duel, Borges has the putative murderer explain the circumstances, innocuous in themselves, in which Rosendo flees the suspicions of the police. 'This story is, obviously, a sequel and an antidote to "Streetcorner Man".'⁶⁸¹ However, there is little that can be read obviously here. It can function as a sequel, since it serves to continue the original action. But as an antidote the tale is completely superfluous, since the audience of the

original fictive poisoning has already purged itself of possible misgivings by creating the literary celebrity that so disturbs its author. If there is a poisoning here, it's the envenation of a work that originally fled, like its now returning hero, the intentional hand of its creator. Borges explains,

*[I] had been rereading my Browning and knew from The Ring and the Book that a story could be told from different points of view. Rosendo Juárez, the seeming coward of the first version, might perhaps be allowed to have his own say. So instead of the braggart of "Streetcorner Man," we get a Shavian character who sees through the romantic nonsense and childish vanity of duelling, and finally attains manhood and sanity.*⁶⁸²

However, why should Rosendo Juárez, a street tough and political standover man, be so amenable to the coercive impulses of manhood and sanity? 'Streetcorner Man' was published under Borges' name in 1935 as the final edited version of the story that he'd signed with a pen name, Francisco Bustos, for *Crítica* two years before.⁶⁸³ This story in turn developed from a much earlier draft called 'Hombres Pelearon' published in the literary review *Martín Fierro* in 1927. However, this was hardly Borges' first venture into print. By 1935 Borges had already published three collections of poetry (*Fervor de Buenos Aires*, *Luna de enfrente*, and *Cuaderno San Martín*), five collections of essays (*Inquisiciones*, *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, *El idioma de los argentinos*, *Evaristo Carriego*, and *Discusión*), as well as numerous lost contributions to the pages of half a dozen forgotten dailies and periodicals. 'Historia de Rosendo Juárez' waited until 1970 to fulfil Borges' normalising recapitulation, but the urge to correct the text is already clearly established. Speaking of one of the now lost essay collections Borges describes his journey from the rigorous imitation of the classics to the equally rigorous imitation of local idiom as a narrative of wilful departure, guilty self-criticism, frantic homecoming and redemptive reconciliation:

*In the first of these reckless compilations, there was a quite bad essay on Sir Thomas Browne, which may have been the first ever attempted on him in the Spanish language. There was another essay, which set out to classify metaphors as though other poetic elements, such as rhythm and music, could be safely ignored. There was a longish essay on the non existence of the ego, cribbed from Bradley or the Buddha or Macedonio Fernández. When I wrote these pieces, I was trying to play the sedulous ape to two Spanish baroque seventeenth-century writers, Quevedo and Saavedra Fajardo, who stood in their own stiff, arid, Spanish way for the same kind of writing as Sir Thomas Browne in "Urne-Buriall." I was doing my best to write Latin in Spanish, and the book collapses under the sheer weight of its involutions and sententious judgements. The next of these failures was a kind of reaction. I went to the other extreme - I tried to be as Argentine as I could. I got hold of Segovia's dictionary of Argentinisms and worked in so many local words that many of my countrymen could hardly understand it. Since I have mislaid the dictionary, I'm not sure I would any longer understand the book myself, and so have given it up as utterly hopeless. The third of these unmentionables stands for a kind of partial redemption. I was creeping out of the second book's style and slowly back to sanity, to writing with some attempt at logic and at making things easy for the reader...*⁶⁸⁴

Such exculpation gives little support for a theory of literary construction based on *minimal* original deviations. Rather it operates by massive swings and over-corrections. Borges' strategy as author of the subtly resonant text is obviously in conflict with his tactical responses to the perception of readerly text. Readability promises sanity: to be readable is to fit into the economy of representation with the minimum of excess. However, the redemption that representation brings is only partial. The literary excesses of his youth survived in a transmuted form: Latinism becomes a disquotational effect of the *ficción* serving to define the narration's friable margins.⁶⁸⁵ Borges' story 'Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*' where a literary hack 're-creates' a few passages from Cervantes' masterpiece by actually becoming Cervantes, and then destroys his work to prevent *its* reproduction in turn by imitators who would imitate the written form instead of the authentic life, also serves to parody quotation.⁶⁸⁶ In a famous example in 'El inmortal' Borges makes an ironic and revealing apology.⁶⁸⁷ Speaking of the text serving as the palimpsest for his

rescription of the legend of the Wandering Jew, he notes: 'The original is written in English and abounds in Latinisms. The version that we offer is literal.' ⁶⁸⁸

5.7.2 Modalising Fictionality in the Fictions

Why privilege the literal, or even superimpose it as if it were an ideal worth approaching? To make the text "literal" is in this case something of an underscoring of literary desire in that the literalisation is immediately lifted off the page as pseudography, and operates as an obvious frustration of the lisible text. As Martin Stabb points out,

[A]lthough "El inmortal" is clearly a story, the underlying ideas rather than a superimposed plot determine its structure. And unlike the tale just examined ("El Zahir"), the fantastic elements are so completely unreal that we accept them as we do myths, with little hesitation". ⁶⁸⁹

The condition for acceptance is fictionality. ⁶⁹⁰ However, Borges still works to erode fictionality by offering the narrative verification of the literal text. Stabb finds the rigorous anachronisms of the tale less important than the idea these anachronisms define: the panscriptability of human personality. As the Roman tribune who acts as the moving narrative process of self-discovery throughout the tale discovers, it's impossible to locate writing's origin: all speech is potentially quotation and requotation. The origin recedes and with it the tenuous certainties of the self. ⁶⁹¹ Lindstrom comments that the act of writing, by forcing writers to draw on the collectively owned repertory of knowledge and skills, leaves them susceptible to the unmistakable interference of alternative selves. ⁶⁹²

Borges saw the later narratives as dependent on minimal deviations. Yet, his early narrative progress redounds in wild stylistic oscillations. We recall the Burgin interview quoting his father's suspicion that memory may be unchained from its origins like Baudrillardian simulacra: 'I think that I recall something...[but] what I'm really recalling is not the first image, but the first image in memory...' ⁶⁹³ There may be nothing but memory, and this memory must feed on itself to keep alive.

Whatever the story's value as psychological theory, its power as an emblem of Borges' desire to discipline narrative is formidable: how many of his fables and stories are dedicated to the evasion of this awful possibility? Borges tell us his father went on to illustrate the inevitable decay of memory by placing coins one atop the other, with the base coin as the authentic memory and all those above it as its echoes of recollection.⁶⁹⁴ One need hardly recount the numerous instances of ontological coinage in Borges' writing. However, the fact that this recollection of recollection's fallibility occurs before Borges was to outline his minimum programme of narrative resonance in *Evaristo Carriego* («recuerdos de recuerdos de otras recuerdos»), critically undermines the impetus for a substantial project. The text of memory becomes seen as nothing more than the echo of other memory texts, yet the leap to the resonant possibilities of intertextuality is obstructed by Borges' nostalgia for "sanity" and "maturity".⁶⁹⁵

One notes an immediate contrast between the Borgesian and the Derridean and Heideggerian projects in the former's desire for order. Whereas Borges is filled with anguish before the eluctable trace of memory, an ontology of the sign as its own shifting presence is all that can be reasonably expected from our participation in the world as perpetual *signans*. As Heidegger puts it, "Experience" has always designated the relationship with a presence, whether that relationship had the form of consciousness or not'.⁶⁹⁶ The experience of the world as a successive continuity with originary implications is not, however, something Borges can take for granted. What if all we have are recollections of other recollections, each one becoming less distinct as it is experienced, like the initial phrase in the game of Chinese Whispers, always prey to imperfect reception and aberrant translation? There's little comfort in phenomenology's ready insistence on an appresentative strategy where the subject's knowledge-of-self is constituted in a two-fold process of negotiation between noema and noesis, since the subject is under the same erasure as the experience he or she sets out to describe. To identify the *sous ratures* of writing with its graphic emblem of the double-cross is to participate in a trahison double indeed. The absence of a presence that Derrida hopes to give notice to functions, as it were, as a halting space on the road to knowledge, even its turning circle. To look back or to look forward amount to the same thing only as long as

the point upon which the knower stands is disregarded. What if Borges' father's troubling reflection is right? To look down at one's feet is to re-present the two-fold nature of knowledge from the presence that may be nothing more than a recollection of a recollection. To accept the possibility of resonant representation as the programme that may yield the most satisfying ontological results for evaluating Borges' writing is to ignore the counter-current of originary desire, for sanity and maturity, that also informs it.

5.7.3 Disciplining the Text by Disciplining Narrators

The case for discipline is well answered by two counter-readings of recollection. The first, 'La escritura del dios' where Tzinacán, the Aztec priest of the pyramid of the god Qaholom, has been captured by the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado and is quietly rotting in a dungeon with only a few objects to elicit sensory, and by extension, reflective stimuli, and the second 'El milagro secreto' in which a Jewish writer is tormented by the impassable gap between writing and experience and finally effects a compromise of consciousness allowing him to complete his "work" in the timeless instant before the lead of a firing-squad will terminate his endeavours.

As a tale 'La escritura del dios' is hardly more than a reflective episode. However, the framing device of narrational prison as experiential prison is fractured by the prisoner's subversion of confinement by the ever-more intricate rearrangement of the meagre sensory stimuli at his disposal. Deprived of the normal artefacts of experience that we take for granted, he becomes engaged in an experiment of sensory recapitulation as a way of passing time until his inevitable demise:

*Urgido por la fatalidad de hacer algo, de poblar de algún modo el tiempo, quise recordar, en mi sombra, todo lo que sabía.*⁶⁹⁷

In Spanish «fatalidad» has a negative connotation which it does not possess in English, being tied to misfortune «desgracia» and disgrace «deshonra». The fatality of action is opposed to the immortality of persistent recapitulatory consciousness, which is positive by implication. To save himself from the disgraceful misfortune of imprisonment at the hands of his enemies Tzinacán retreats to his own mythological stock-of-knowledge-at-hand, and recalls the

tenuous outline of an almost forgotten legend of a magic sentence spoken by the god Qaholom at the moment of genesis. The sentence may be quoted by an elect of the god, but the *form* of the sentence is disguised as one of the ephemerae of creation, thus protecting it from accidental utterance. The task for the captive becomes one of discovering, in the gloom of a prison cell, the secret mark whose expression by the apprehending subject will confer its enlightenment.

To prepare us for the moment of revelation when Tzinacán will utter the sacred syllables Borges employs the technique of phenomenal recapitulation: we are told that before Tzinacán is graced with the intuition of the god's sacred quest he has «[N]oches enteras malgasté en recordar el orden y el número de unas sierpes de piedra o la forma de un árbol medicinal».⁶⁹⁸ The night in which he receives the precise recollection of the legend occurs as a symbolic awakening of imaginative concretization's speculative plane. Here the presentational and formal aspects of phenomena are reversed in order, with the presentational (the cell, the cracks in a stone, the medicinal tree, and later a jaguar) standing-in for the formal that will be revealed in the priest's acknowledgment of the sacred sentence.

However, the shortcomings of phenomenal recapitulation are obvious: as the struggle to interpret proceeds throughout ever more exacting degrees of intricacy, the formal world becomes dissolved in the presentational phenomenon. After having exhausted the objects close at hand Tzinacán fixes his attention on a jaguar that occupies the next cell and becomes determined to unravel the code of his spotted pelt. Over the long years that he dedicates to deciphering the sentence that will set him free he entertains a Cartesian devotion to the task of epistemological foundationalism:

*No diré las fatigas de mi labor. Más de una vez grité a la bóveda que era imposible descifrar aquel texto. Gradualmente, el enigma concreto que me atareaba me inquietó menos que el enigma genérico de una sentencia escrita por un dios. ¿Qué tipo de sentencia (me pregunté) construirá una mente absoluta?*⁶⁹⁹

If Tzinacán can't clearly opt for the cogito it's only because his own ontological security is guaranteed by the rigours of the quest. The spotted pelt of the jaguar occupies his attention so completely that

doubt, as an internalised phenomenon, can't exist. Nor can the possibility of indeterminacy in Ingarden's sense of an unconscious filling-in of the text's objectivity with the subject's individual experience.⁷⁰⁰ The patterns on the jaguar's pelt are the syllables of the sacred sentence conferring unlimited power upon its utterer, therefore they have to be interpreted as such, and not as a description of experience. As syllables their function is connotatively concrete, but fulfils no denotative promise: Tzinacán can't fit the syllables into his experience of the world, they will only serve to free him of his prison.

5.7.4 Borges' Cosmic Implication

Given the manifest difficulties of Tzinacán's position one would expect the continuation of the quest until an accommodation is made to the impossibility of escape, either in madness or resignation. Borges' solution is however, more ingenious, though revealingly incompatible with the requirements of ontological security:

*Consideré que aun en los lenguajes humanos no hay proposición que no implique el universo entero: decir el tigre es decir los tigres que lo engendraron, los ciervos y tortugas que devoró, el pasto de que se alimentaron los ciervos, la tierra que fue madre del pasto, el cielo que dio luz a la tierra.*⁷⁰¹

Obviously Ingarden's 'points of indeterminacy' stand in danger of potential closure if Tzinacán's project is successful. Borges' rage for order is, it seems, about to be realised fictively through the priest's eventually successful effort at interpretation. However, by this time having glimpsed himself as one implication among the infinite implications of the universe, he realises the futility of revenge and meditates instead on the improbability of personal existence:

*Que muera conmigo el misterio que está escrito en los tigres. Quien ha entrevisto el universo, quien ha entrevisto los ardientes designios del universo, no puede pensar en un hombre, en sus triviales dichas o desventuras, aunque ese hombre sea él. Ese hombre ha sido él y ahora no le importa.*⁷⁰²

As a counter-reading of recollection 'La escritura del dios' is able to defuse the myth of omniscience as power by subverting the narrator's

identity in a moment of true revelation ('...now I no longer remember Tzinacán') which is counterposed to a previous fruitless attempt at revelation ('I have misspent entire nights in memorising the order and number of cracks in a stone...'). The act of revenge upon his Spanish captor that omniscience would have made possible is avoided by the narrator's final sense of restraint when confronted with the ultimate futility of trivial human action in the context of the cosmos: «Por eso no pronuncio la fórmula, por eso dejo que me olviden los días, acostado en la oscuridad». ⁷⁰³ Tzinacán has reached maturity and sanity as his author's emblematic presence.

The trope of persistent recapitulatory consciousness (one could call it Borges' master trope without much danger of contradiction) finds another expression in 'El milagro secreto' but in this case the narrator's voice has been subsumed in a quasi-dialectic between three narrative personas: Jaromir Hladík, a Jewish scholar trapped by the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, a Nazi camp-commandant Julius Rothe, and God. The historical details are unimportant since the basic elements of the plot recur throughout Borges' writing career as staples of narrative: an artist's life is reviewed and the creative impulse is revealed as a mystic programme of interpretation. It may be threatened by such contingencies as a lack of artistic recognition ('Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain'), or captivity ('La escritura del dios'), or self-effacing anonymity ('Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*'). ⁷⁰⁴ Although the strategy is identical in its effects, the resolution of the uncertainty of creative interpretation is developed in various modalities, of which persistent *recapitulatory* consciousness is one example. ⁷⁰⁵ Persistent consciousness can also be *creative*, as is demonstrated by God's granting of Hladík's prayer to be permitted to finish the composition of a verse drama *Los enemigos* in the magically enlarged instant before the bullets of a firing squad obliterate him. ⁷⁰⁶ Like Tzinacán, Hladík proceeds through a ritual of preemptive prognostication after his capture, imagining himself as the persistency of consciousness that might substitute for life:

Miserable en la noche, procuraba afirmarse de algún modo en la sustancia fugitiva del tiempo. Sabía que éste se precipitaba hacia el alba del día veintinueve; razonaba en voz alta: Ahora estoy en la noche del veintidós; mientras dure esta noche (y seis noches más) soy invulnerable, inmortal. ⁷⁰⁷

Instead of concentrating on the ephemera of his cell or a jaguar's hieroglyphic pelt Hladík's odyssey of persistence takes the form of artistic composition: with only six days before his execution he continues *Los enemigos*. However, the god may give up his gifts only to the worthy who have proved themselves by a trial of faith. Hladík finds although the task of composition can be effected fairly easily, the project itself will require a great deal of time. In the darkness of his cell he prays to a God he has come to think of as an author for another year of captivity:

*Si de algún modo existo, si no soy una de tus repeticiones y erratas, existo como autor de Los enemigos. Para llevar a término ese drama, que puede justificarme y justificarte, requiero un año más. Otórgame esos días, Tú de Quien son los siglos y el tiempo.*⁷⁰⁸

Hladík is granted the moment of revelation justifying his plea in a dream where his search for God is represented as the hunt for a single letter in all the tomes of a vast library, a search that is rewarded in one of the letters of a geographical name in an atlas of India. One can identify its previous incarnation in 'La biblioteca de Babel' and its thematic similarity to 'La escritura del dios' and even find the echo of the library's indefinite but uncouneted hexagonal galleries in the 'labyrinth of galleries, staircases and banners' Hladík expects to locate on the other side of his prison cell.⁷⁰⁹ The modality of doubt ('I asked myself: What kind of sentence would an absolute mind construct?' and 'If I do exist in some way...') also resonates within the texts at the twin points of the defeat of rationality before revelation. However, the 'answers' each protagonist gives to their god differ markedly. While Tzinacán's recognition of the infinite power he might unleash against his captors is mitigated by a dissolution of identity, Hladík's consciousness is recaptured as a sign of redemption, 'a personal pact between god and a man,' thus establishing recapitulatory and creative persistent consciousness as effective counter modalities that undo the certainties of repetition.⁷¹⁰

Conclusion:

Defining and Disciplining the Borgesian Text

I have explored the status of the *Fiction* as Borges' ultimate narrative development, reading it as emerging from personal biography and against the background its textual predecessors. The Saussurean tool of the 'play with a cast of three' allows us to make evaluations of the fitness of the Borgesian text, not only as a contribution to its predecessors, but also as a *potential actor* for narrative modification in later works.⁷¹¹

Such a view puts us in possession of a way of seeing the disjunctions that the Borgesian text throws up as radical defamiliarisations, pursuant to the ideals of the 1920 Ultraist manifesto. Metaphor and analogy become the key conceptual viewpoints from which to understand the progressive and dynamic qualities of Borges' theory of meaning in the condensation of the lyric as the 'the synthesis of two or more images in one, in this way amplifying their suggestibility'.⁷¹² This suggestibility, both as image and as a metaphorical strategy, provides a vantage point for viewing the Borgesian project, either from 'within' as reading intelligence, or from 'without' as critical theorist.⁷¹³ Of course, I have presented the genesis of this suggestibility as emerging from Borges' pre-theoretical influences, and then demonstrated how one might interpret his particular biases - against psychology, against traditional narrative - as their coherent elaboration in relation to the art work. One finds this process in Borges' identification of an apparently simple opposition (and here his thoughts on metaphor are crucial) and its elaboration into an ever more complex structure that serves to generate its own creative possibilities without, that is, narrative's traditional supports of folk-psychological motivation and the continuous accretion of circumstantial detail. This is Borges the formalist, even naively so. It's also Borges the pre-structuralist. In rejecting Freudianism Borges was obliged to create an explanation of how meaning is made in narrative that both anticipates and challenges the French theory that would eventually supersede it. In a way Borges is a microcosm of

structuralism's dilemmas. Just as Saussure hit upon the opposition between the named and the unnamed in language simultaneously operating to fashion our understanding, Borges detected the generative power of metaphorical opposition as an Ultraist, pursuing its signifiatory paradoxes as a means to unsettle the use of everyday language and invest it with a poetic sensibility it had seemed to have forgotten. Later he applied his insights to larger syntactic structures through an investigation of Norse *kennings* as signifiers of a coherent mythology that anticipating Lévi-Strauss. And who would not be struck, reading Barthes, at the similarity between myth as a form of speech and Borges' analysis of the emblem as a continuously surfacing and sinking structural mechanism? However, just as structuralism was prey to corrosive counter-critique, I have been obliged to supply its cataclysm in the form of a series of deconstructionist arguments. But I have been cautious, betting on both outcomes with the single coin of constructive criticism, objections to Borges' theories furnishing new ways of seeing his discontinuities and obliging one to create interpretative mechanisms to organise and explain them.

The Borgesian narrative is the outcome of a complex ontological and linguistic exploration, an exploration that involves Borges in a complex exercise of examination, repression, accommodation and attempted synthesis. The *ficción* is both the elaboration of this process, and its failed reconciliation. I investigated Borges' philosophical evolution through his use of key ideas in various modalities. In Chapter One I took the step of separating the poetic use of time from its syntactic counterpart, thereby establishing it as an important sign on which to base a critique of Borges' ontological concerns. I established the poet's orientation to time, as either a grammatical effect, a generalised phenomenon, or a quasi-objective entity, without which it would have been impossible to delineate Borges' fragmented self-situation to existence.

Chapter Two continued a close reading of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, broadening the analysis to include Borges' subsequent poetic works: *Luna de enfrente* and *Cuaderno de San Martín*. I focused on Borges' use of spatiality as an analogue to that of temporality already explored. I found that space does not map time perfectly, exposing Borges' need to return to *ordinary life* to reconcile his philosophical contradictions. Thus, Borges returns to the primary concerns of the Argentine *Ultraists* for the semantic reality of common life. Philosophical aporia oblige him to explore his ontological concerns in a more concrete mode, the elaboration of semantic symbolism at the linguistic level. Words are seen as the bearers of linguistic values allowing a conceptual foundation to be mapped. This emerges as the product of their function as parts of speech. Borges investigates the interplay of words, and the propositional attitudes that they entail, as the spring from which metaphorical relations are born. This constitutes a true Borgesian theory of verbal relations based on an implicitly *propositional* element serving to structure phrasal groups as a series of modal descriptions and formal postponements.

Chapter Three read Borges' modality argument depicting language-use as the outcome of a certain range of syntactic possibilities; it is therefore syntagmatic. Yet, because Borges assumes that reading is sequential, the *order* of words must be grasped prior to its "recognition" as syntagm. Thus, syntagmatic meanings are *postponed* until it comes time to fit the assembled sequence of words into its role as *specimen*. His argument for formal postponement, however, presupposes that the particular possibilities for making sense of language that the user selects are already existent as the product of the initial grammatical associations through which language is received, and which serve to structure the user's world-view. As such they are not so much syntagmatic as *paradigmatic*, constituting a body of verbal anticipations for the part of the world we are referring to at the time. Borges contrasts two existential paradigms emerging from his ontological unease, the materialist and idealistic versions of the world, and even sketches a reconciliation. This is crucial for his narrative development, and will remain fundamental throughout his writing career. Although he recognises literature as a symbolic creation, he also recognises its characters and images as semi-independent textual objects. True literature thus becomes the creation

of a persistent symbolic repertoire whose resources are available for eternal recombination.

Chapter Four elaborated Borges' poetics. He presents a highly integrated aesthetic and linguistic programme that avoids the aesthetic sterilities of high art by creating independent textual objects through which we establish a symbolic identification with the text. This association is not an *en bloc* phenomenon, but occurs as the product of a number of symbolic associations, having their own history in the text, which agglomerate in, and are borne by, the character of a major character. This does not imply the personality of the character is the product of psychological features, but that it functions as the bearer of a symbolic complex through which we identify the defining features of the text. Thus, Borges avoids both the necessity for psychological portrayal, and the details of realistic description. Characters reveal their fictive integrity not only through expressive acts (speech, thought, reflection) but also through the universality and location of these acts within the textual artefact. However, does such a mechanics of the symbol allow for varying interpretation? Not according to the way Borges sets up his argument for magic causality. Symbolic complexes are determined by the text, established as a series of imagic harmonies which work toward their final denouement under the sign of a recurrent, but submerged, image.

Chapter Five revisited key concerns. I described the resonances between Borges' texts and his own commentaries on them in terms of the disciplining of desire. The *fictions* describe desire in terms of the absolution of rationality in mystical redemption. Redemption becomes a creative endeavour, an opportunity for personal dissolution, confronting protagonists with crucial life-choices and forcing them to evolve as mature personalities. Borges' commentaries describe an identical process. However, whereas in a narrative the action may be complete, Borges' corpus was unviewable as such throughout his lifetime, and couldn't therefore be recognised as an analogue for the journey from obsessive rationality to redemptive enlightenment. Also the technique of recapitulation presents a problem for phenomenological accounts of consciousness in literature, since it involves a reversal of the order of apprehension. Tzinacán struggles to interpret the non-linguistic jaguar's pelt as a unique codification of divine language instead of seeing it simultaneously as shape and

signification involving the unconscious recognition of the characteristics that endow it with sense. As a technique for unsettling narrative, Borges' use of persistent recapitulatory consciousness explains how desire is frustrated by the very impulse that constitutes it. It also serves as an analogue for the unravelling of his unique narrative technique as the depiction of simulacrous memory melting into a mystic resignation. The correction of unruly text forms part of Borges' odyssey, even if he may not have initially set out on a mission of discipline.

If the dissertation ends with a deconstruction of analogy, one might also say that it begins with one, tucked away in Borges' cryptic remarks on the nature of nascent literary creation. If there is trouble in the labyrinth of Borges' thought, it is trouble we can only exorcise by going all the way through.

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Endnotes to Glossary

¹ Does such a motivational rationale have its analogue in the 'psychological' stylistics' of Leo Spitzer? Wellek and Warren's comment that Spitzer's assumption applies only to certain writers, ones showing a uniquely formed genius, would tend, as the authors point out, to limit its application to authors who have been selected by the critic as already exhibiting those qualities that the critic wishes to find in the first

place, and is thus circular. René Wellek and Austin Warren 1963: *Theory of Literature* p. 183. As for Borges' avowedly nominalistic stance, both in the study of philosophy (See *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*) and literature, there is evidence that he was continually working to infiltrate his later *ficciones* from a position he had inherited from Fritz Mauthner's views on the primacy of content-elements in language to construct the reader's world. Borges himself refers off-handedly to Mauthner's *Kritik der Sprache* in 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins', p. 707.

² Tzvetan Todorov 1975: *The Fantastic: A Structuralist Approach to a Literary Genre*, p. 110.

³ 'In most literary texts, however, the sequence of sentences is so structured that the correlates serve to modify and even frustrate the expectations they have aroused.' Wolfgang Iser 1978: *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, p. 111. See also Northrop Frye 1963: 'Myth, Fiction, and Displacement' in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, p. 26.

⁴ See René Wellek and Austin Warren 1963: *Theory of Literature* pp. 182-3.

⁵ Aristotle 1965: On the Art of Poetry in *Aristotle, Horace, Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism*. p. 65.

⁶ See Wolfgang Iser 1978: *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, pp. 13-7; Mikel Dufrenne 1973: *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 345.

⁷ See Milton K. Munitz 1974: *Existence and Logic*, p. 6.

Endnotes to Introduction

⁸ Among recent Spanish studies I can only applaud the ingenuity of Albert Julián Pérez's 1986 Bakhtinian critique, *Poética de la prosa de J. L. Borges*, a study that also deserves emulation, especially in the light of other recent continental semioticians and philosophers, a line followed in Michel Lafon's 1990 post-structuralist engagement, *Borges ou la réécriture*.

⁹ But this is not to say that I have adopted the rather imaginative way of dealing with *time* and *space* followed by Bachelard, Poulet or Lefebvre. For this analysis time and space exist as words that Borges can only use in certain ways. Their connotative value is thus not as important as their denotative functionality, which I argue is crucial for my reading. If

it comes to it, my approach can be described as biographically archetypal with sociological leanings, structuralist assumptions, and deconstructionist pretensions.

¹⁰ The purpose of this dissertation may be seen as, in part, an extension to I. A. Richards' four-fold reading of written communication: while one may easily distinguish (1) *Sense* as the physical things referred to by the writer; (2) *Feeling* as the emotional attitude the writer may be said to have towards these things; (3) *Tone* as the writer's attitude towards his audience, and (4) *Intention* as the writer's purpose, I would add (5) *Determination* as the outcome, or [propositional attitude](#) that the reader *must have* if they agree with the content of the art work. *Determination* may be expressed in terms of the logical interaction of 1-4 in an ordered series of relations that commits the reader to a point of view he or she did not previously possess. The question arises, however, if we can say that the writer meant to give the reader such a jolt, or whether we are reading, in the case of antique poetry for instance, with our historical lenses on and falsely construe the poem's meaning. Because determination is strictly a logical means of interpretation, I would argue that the historical circumstances of any communication are irrelevant to its Sense, and therefore play an ever-diminishing role in Meanings 2,3 and 4. Looking at literature in this way is not, I would reiterate, a means of getting rid of affective considerations, which make poetry for example such a rewarding experience, but of merely confining my study of Borges' work to a territory that may be less equivocally mapped. I make the claim that had the writers of the most hostile protocols in Richards' *Practical Criticism* done more work in examining the conceptual commitments that led them to such tirades, they would have discovered a quite novel means of forming their opinions that could have led the English-speaking world to anticipate Continental structuralism.

¹¹ In a partial parallel to my own work, Patricia Hart has worked hard to distinguish the novels of Isabel Allende from those of the "magical realist" school, and the reader is invited to peruse her survey in *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende*. Cranbury, N. J.: Associated University Presses, 1989, pp. 12-27. Coincidentally, Hart's aim has also been to establish creative autonomy for Allende's creative production from the over-whelming, but largely US promoted, influence of Gabriel García Márquez as a recent "star" in the so-called renaissance of Latin American literature. Borges too suffered from the

cultural myopia of an English language audience through the hegemony by US publishers on the international publishing scene, and it was only after Borges was taken up by a French audience in the 1960s, and this caused him to be regarded with interest by the large university's, particularly Yale, that the *ficciones* were disseminated in translation. As proof of such an inflammatory position it is still possible to find an educated audience, even in university English departments, which is blissfully unaware of the poetry with which he established his reputation in Argentina, or consider it of only marginal interest. As for his literary and linguistic work the situation is even worse, with neither *El idioma de los argentinos*, *Il tamaño de mi esperanza*, or *Inquisiciones* available at this time (1995) in English. Based on such a selective dissemination the claim for any Latin American renaissance is extremely dubious. Even the casual observer will be aware that such a "renaissance" of Latin American writing is truly miraculous, since it has occurred without the precondition of literary dormancy which a re-birth would imply, and seems to be a fiction predicated on the novelty of Spanish publication from Latin America in *English translation* rather than an historical effulgence. I'm not suggesting that there are not similarities in Borges' *ficciones* with the magical realists: clearly a narrative like 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' relies on the introduction of a fantastic element into daily life, efforts to explain its presence and come to terms with it, which in the case of the encyclopedia, turn out to be fruitless, Tlönista idealism finally infecting the materialist universe into which it has intruded. But because this narrative occurs relatively late in the Borgesian corpus, almost a decade after the work on linguistics and poetics that I'm claiming as formative to his ideas on [Metaphor](#) as a paradigm for conceptual relations, I would argue that the works by which we recognise the Argentine author today as "magic realist" are probably the least representative of his early views on narrative as an environment where simple logical relations predominate over complex realist ones. Allende's working-through of the problem of what constitutes "magic realism" is based on the juxtaposition of, and matter of fact description of, the realistic and fantastic, this involving the challenging of conventional notions of time, space, location and identity, but with the political aim of changing the reader's prejudices by an extension of the internal contradictions of the narrative to a wider environment outside it [Ibid. 27]. Within such a framework Borges' Ultraísta poetry, which asserted that ordinary life

was extraordinary in itself, and only needed a change in attitude in the percipient to allow this fact to become clear, violates magical realism's emphasis on the "juxtaposition" of the real and the fantastic, as well as transgressing the usual application of magical realism to prose narrative. Added to this his essays on literature and linguistics cannot be included, since they establish no narrative frame, nor do they deal with the appearance of the fantastic. Even Borges' first real work of narrative, the *Universal History of Infamy*, mostly fail on the grounds of fantastic inclusion, the stories relying on the dead-pan description of extraordinary but real events for their tone of ironic reflection. The first exceptions to this that can be considered to qualify as "magical realist" are a series of much smaller narratives, never more than two pages in length, included as an afterthought under the title *Etcetera*. If Borges was a magical realist he only arrived after a long period of being anything but.

¹² Here I provide an alternative reading for Borges' poetic subjectivity to that found in Martínez Cuitiño's systematisation ("Los Borges del Fervor") and Mariana Fusario's 'Los "yo" de Borges en *Luna de enfrente*,' (*Letras XIX-XX* May-April 1988 and January-December 1994 respectively) based on a more rigorously linguistic approach.

¹³ This does not imply, however, that I have opted for a universalist or bitterly polemic reading, having long since given up the search for ultimate truths about the nature of human, or social, consciousness. I would never, for example, be courageous enough to claim, as Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, to have discovered a methodological error among the semioticians that has gone thus far ignored - viz. that an analytic discourse based on the *coupure* 'interrupt[s] the continuity of their argument in the name of a discontinuity which their own methodology ought logically to prohibit' (p. 5). For my part I cannot think whom Lefebvre has been reading, since the investigations of Derrida (dismissed on one page and in a single footnote), Kristeva (mentioned on one page and in three footnotes), and Barthes (scathingly attacked over the space of three pages, on a single introductory page, and in three short footnotes) are strewn with the discontinuities that he cannot find, and cannot, in fact, function without periodic textual ruptures, a point readily attested to by the authors. But, in any event, since he repays his targets with such scant acknowledgment in his own work, it is difficult to afford his criticisms the scrutiny they would otherwise deserve. Where I critique

Derrida on method I do so from a desire to push his own analysis out of shape a little to see what will happen - being well-made and highly elastic, it usually springs back, slapping me in the face.

¹⁴ For the purposes of this dissertation, the word 'intention' has no psychologistic importance. It is, rather, expressed as action in accord with the logical consequence of an author's statements. Thus, If Beth tells Tom she cannot meet him on Tuesday for lunch, and Tom tells Beth he will not therefore call for her on that day, it would be logically incoherent, or indicate a serious lapse of memory, for Beth to upbraid her friend on Wednesday for standing her up. Of course, it must also be assumed that there were no ironic gestures or intonations during the circumstances of this exchange. To circumvent Borges' irony I have used only those statements that he himself repeated, and emphasised as statements of recollection or belief, as the basis for my reading in this dissertation.

Endnotes to Chapter One

¹⁵ Whether these concerns are 'fundamental' or not I can only claim to be pursuing Borges' own statements in the discussion that follows to this effect.

¹⁶ This is not an incautious methodology. Most biographical accounts of creative development rest on the strong assumption of causative factors (whether called "concerns," "preoccupations," or even "obsessions" makes little difference) in childhood and adolescence that are developed by the artist in maturity.

¹⁷ One of the most entertaining of these fantasies is supplied by Ernesto Sabato 1964: *Les deux Borges*. In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 168-178. We learn what *might* have been a set of crucial influences on Borges' literary and philosophical development, and the article is valuable for its style as much as its hypotheses.

¹⁸ I have avoided a psychoanalytical frame of reference for the reason that Borges himself avoids it. Seeing art as a product of complex, but logically explicit, interactions, he consistently denigrates psychoanalytical explanation as being unmanageable and incoherent, as will become evident in the following discussion. Nor should this account be confused with the project of existential philosophy to see being in terms of a dialectic of self-interrogation: being for Borges

seems to be something that can be delineated by intellectual progress alone. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty 1968: *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁹ It is an obvious fact that many, if not most, young poets are strongly taken by the importance of their own impressions and feelings as a means through which to filter objective experience. As such they participate in the myth of poetic subjectification. Why should this be so? Strictly speaking, there is no *necessary* link between one's feelings and the phenomena of exterior experience: one's "writing like a poet" has no bearing on how well or ill the world may be interpreted in language. Thus, imitating poetic models will be of only limited use forging a new manner of linguistic description. As my account develops I make use of a formal reading of key concepts in Borges' poetry to demarcate linguistic use from merely rhetorical verbiage. But whether I can really claim to have freed myself from the gravitational pull of the subject is a moot point. In prescribing a theory I'm in fact *proscribing* other theories: progesis becomes a side-effect of exegesis. See David Carroll 1982: *The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction*, p. 18.

²⁰ Why not call problems about being metaphysics? It is customary to divide metaphysics into ontology, which deals with the question of how many fundamentally distinct sorts of entities compose the universe, and metaphysics proper, which is concerned with determining how anything may exist at all. Thus, metaphysics describes 'reality' in only the broadest terms. Reality is described in terms that would apply to any universe. Metaphysics may therefore be conducted at the highest level of abstraction. By contrast, because ontology investigates the divisions within this universe, it is more closely related to the physical world of human experience.

²¹ Ramón Gomez de la Serna 1924, pp. 123-27; Evar Méndez 1927: Doce poetas nuevos. *Síntesis*. Vol. 1, no. 4, p. 17. Gene Bell-Villada (*Borges and His Fiction*, 1981, p. 15) notes that it was largely due to Borges' single-handed efforts at self-publicity that allowed *Fervor de Buenos Aires* to come to later critical acclaim

²² Richard Burgin 1969: *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges*, p. 27. By Borges' metaphysics I mean his underlying assumptions about the nature of existence. The following discussion of the separation between the idiomatic, grammatical and poetic use of the word 'time' is partially modelled on James' views in Chapter XVII of his *Psychology*,

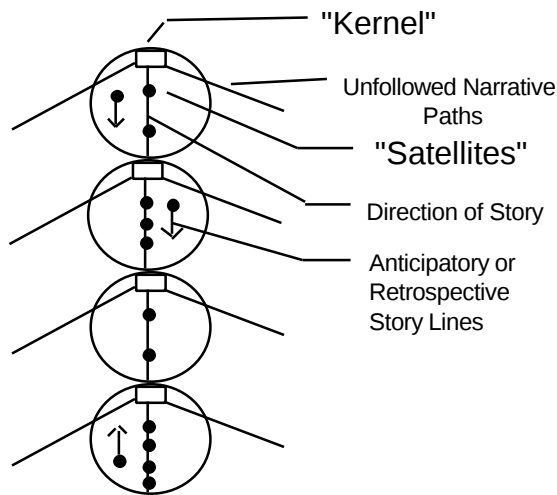
a handbook that Borges' father used as the basis for his own teaching. As for Borges' introduction to philosophy, his mother recounts that it began as early as the age of ten: 'Pour cette dernière discipline, il lisait beaucoup et il parlait avec son père, car mon mari, tout en étant avocat, faisait un cours sur la psychologie anglaise à l'Institut des Langues vivantes; tous deux commencèrent à parler philosophie quand Georgie avait dix ans.' Propos de Mme. Leonor Acevedo de Borges. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 11.

²³ Persistence *and* duplication? Since duplication guarantees the persistence of identity I have opted to cite both phenomena as evidence of an entity's continuation.

²⁴ This theme is also expressed in Borges' reflections on the role of the fictional Don Quijote in the novel *Don Quijote*. See Debra A. Castillo 1984: *The Translated World: A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature*, pp. 76.

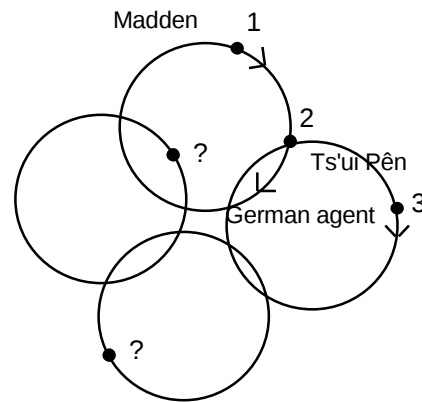
²⁵ See Rawdon R. Wilson 1990: *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game, and Narrative Theory*, p. 204. Peter Hutchinson comments that the Borgesian detective story actually allows its reader more scope for writerly consumption due to its metaphysical level. See Peter Hutchinson 1983: *Games Authors Play*, p. 24. One could make similar claims for Chesterton's Father Brown series, if morality is allowed to substitute for metaphysicality.

²⁶ See Jerome Klinkowitz 1981: *The Novel as Artifact: Spatial Form in Contemporary Fiction*, p. 39. For a way in which this ramification is developed as a series of links in a narrative chain, see Seymour Chatman 1990: *Story and Narrative*. In Dennis Walder (ed) 1990: *Literature in the Modern World*, pp. 113-4.



Circles = Narrative Blocks

In Chatman's schema Borges' story 'The Garden of Forking Paths' represents a series of interlocking, yet retroactive, plot-lines that interfere with a sequential reading of the text.



In my own cyclic version, each satellite can either move on its arc in the direction of its orbit, or change direction radically when it intersects another narrative block. Thus, the narrator Madden (1) can either follow the path described by his host Ts'ui Pên (2), or start off after the German agent (3), leading in turn to other orbital intersections.

²⁷ '...es trivial y fortuita la circunstancia de que seas tú el lector de estos ejercicios, y yo su redactor' (The circumstance that I should be the editor of these exercises and you the reader is a fortuitous triviality.) 'A quien leyere' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 15. Chesterton, who 'habla de un cárcel de espejos, habla de un laberinto sin centro' (who speaks of a prison of mirrors, who speaks of a labyrinth without a centre) who Borges had read as a young teenager, is an obvious influence on his imagic repertoire. In 'Sobre Chesterton', 1974, p. 695. See also Wendy B. Faris 1991: 'The Labyrinth as Sign' in Mary Ann Caws (ed) 1991: *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy and Film*, pp. 37.

²⁸ I shall return to the idea of homoeopathsia as a [Metaphor](#) for symbolic incorporation in §§ 4.1.2 & 4.1.6.

²⁹ Borges was to wrestle with this problem most fully, although inconclusively (the essay is an inversion of Zeno's problem via Russell's proof for the infinity of collections) in 'La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga' in *Discusión*, 1974, pp. 244-248; 'Avatares de la tortuga' *ibid*, pp. 254-258; 'Historia de la eternidad', *ibid*, p. 354 f; 'La doctrina de los ciclos', *ibid*, pp. 385-392; 'El tiempo circular', *ibid*, pp. 393-396; 'Sobre el "Vathek" de William Beckford', *ibid*, pp. 729-732.

Henri Bergson, whom Borges probably first read during his enforced sojourn in Geneva during World War I, describes the Eleatics' paradox in terms of a confusion between the words motion and space: motion is actually a linguistic compound involving both physical movement and the space that is traversed within that movement (*Time and Free Will*, pp. 112-113). Thus, in using the sentence "Achilles moves twice as far as the tortoise" we are actually expressing two thoughts: "Achilles moves and the tortoise moves in the same instant" and "The space the tortoise moves in the same instant as Achilles moves is twice that of his rival". This converts the concept of time into its spatial homologue - time cannot be seen as detached from space.

³⁰ See James' comments on the difference between 'reproductive memory' and the successive recollection of events in William James 1910: *Psychology*. London: Macmillan and Co, Chapters XVII ('The Sense of Time'), and XVIII ('Memory'), pp. 286, 287-8. In 'Funes the Memorius' Borges was to describe an extreme case of psychotic remembrance that probably has its origin in Bergson's description of involuntary memory: 'A human being who should *dream* his life instead of living it would no doubt thus keep before his eyes at each moment the infinite multitude of the details of his past history. And, on the other hand, the man who should repudiate this memory with all that it begets would be continually acting his life instead of truly representing it to himself: a conscious automaton, he would follow the lead of useful habits which prolong into an appropriate reaction the stimulation received.' Henri Bergson 1911 [Eighth impression 1970]: *Matter and Memory*, p. 201. It is obvious, if Borges heard this passage at any time, that his father's dilemma became a powerful influence on his own life conditioning his artistic expression. 'Funes' it will be remembered, while initially exulting in his newfound ability as Bergson's *dreamer*, eventually sickens of it, and longs for the peace of the automaton.

³¹ Borges in 'An Autobiographical Essay', 1971, p. 207. Also see Richard Burgin 1969, p. 27. See also *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, 1982, p. 157.

³² As Norman Nicholson remarks on William Saroyan, his vision is one of Eden rather than earth, and his tales are biblical rather than terrestrial. In a similar way Borges' stories are attempts to supplant the mundanity of everyday life by recourse to philosophical devices, as in stories like *Tlön*, *Uqbar*, *Orbis Tertius*, where an idealist universe

impinges on, and then supplants, its materialist rival. See Norman Nicholson 1944: *Man and Literature*, pp. 140-141.

³³ What little we have of Leonor, we have through second-hand accounts and passing references. As Tillie Olsen notes, quoting Virginia Woolf, when one hears of a famous male writer, it is well to look for a woman, often a mother, behind the pen. As Borges' father was also a writer, and the young Jorge was surrounded by a vast library in several languages, Olsen's implication is perhaps a little overstated. See Tillie Olsen, 1965: *Silences*, pp. 219 n. 220. Obviously his mother's activity as a translator influenced Borges' own efforts. As Victoria Ocampo relates Borges, during 1936-7, published Spanish versions of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Orlando*; in 1941 Henri Michaux's *Un barbare en Asie*; in 1944 Faulkner's *Wild Palms* and André Gide's *Perséphone*. See Victoria Ocampo 1964: Visions de Jorge Luis Borges. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 22. The link to Michaux, an author whose narrative technique resembles and precedes Borges' own, is intriguing. As Eberhard Geisler points out, Borges became personally acquainted with the novelist in 1936 when he visited Buenos Aires to attend an international congress of the PEN organisation. El otro de Borges, Michaux. In Blüher, Karl Alfred and Toro, Alfonso de (eds.) 1995, pp. 113-4.

³⁴ As Henri Bergson, whom Borges read as a teenager in Geneva remarks, just as the self is constituted through language, it is also fragmented by it, becoming, when we choose to examine it, a succession of selves all melting into each other depending on the social conditions into which we intrude. Henri Bergson 1910 [Eighth impression 1971]: *Time and Free Will*, p. 128.

³⁵ See Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, p. 55.

³⁶ As Richard Ohmann implies, one of the characteristics that has determined Borges' theoretical reception as a "postmodern" is the incorporation of this appropriation as an illocutionary disjunction in his *ficciones*. See Richard M. Ohmann 1971: *Speech, Action, and Style*, p. 252.

³⁷ Borges later succinctly illustrated this tension in the 1964 volume of poems *El otro, el mismo* (*The Other, The Same*) whose principle theme as its title suggests, is the historical reproduction of identity. Is anything other than an historicist view possible? As Stanley Fish notes, quoting Richard Rorty, any theory that seeks to explain any part of the real world involves one's apprehension of the before and after of the

situation under discussion. Thus, theory, even theory which pretends to untheoreticality, implies an historicity that comes as a consequence of its causal mechanism. See Stanley Fish 1985: *Consequences*, pp.

112. Even the best of postmodernists (or perhaps they are retro-modernists nowadays?) are immune to a little historicism from time to time, as Umberto Eco demonstrates waxing lyrical about the reader's experience of collective memory. Umberto Eco 1994, p. 131

³⁸ For Borges' transfer of the motion question onto the temporal question, see 'El tiempo y J. W. Dunne', 1974, p. 648: 'Los teólogos definen la eternidad como la simultánea y lúcida posesión de todos los instantes del tiempo y la declaran uno de los atributos divinos.' Borges would later use the Georg Cantor's concept of the *aleph* ?? as the basis for his narrative of the same name. Both the mathematical symbol and Borges' image are representations of a single entity which has the potential for an infinite multiplicity of points within it, each of which is the mirror for all the other points. See Gene Bell-Villada, 1981: *Borges and His Fiction*, p. 227.

³⁹ It's not hard to see its genesis as a parable for the problems of disposing of nuclear waste in Borges' father's illustrations with the chessboard. Nor is it difficult to appropriate Borges' image of the Aleph, the mystical symbol which can be viewed from an infinity of locations, but which allows the viewer to view infinities of locations, as a [Metaphor](#) for travels on a CD ROM drive, where a text search becomes a 'travelling Aleph'. 'The Garden of Forking Paths' with its endlessly ramifying structure, also serves equally well. See George T. Landow 1992: *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, p. 12. And the image can even be reproduced as a CD ROM game, quoting Stuart Moulthrop's 1987 *Forking Paths: An Interaction after Jorge Luis Borges*. (Landow, pp. 40, 111.) For a discussion of Borges' use of the mathematical symbol of the *aleph* as a [Metaphor](#) for the potentially infinite, see Gene Bell-Villada (*Borges and His Fiction*, 1981, pp. 226-7.

⁴⁰ Richard Burgin 1969: *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges*, pp. 28-9. The same anecdote appears modified in an interview with Willis Barnstone for *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, 1982, p. 24. Although I have not been able to find any direct proof, it is more than likely that Guillermo Borges' [ontological](#) unease springs from passages in William James dealing with memory and sense of self: 'As a mere subjective phenomenon the judgement [of personal identity] presents no special

mystery. It belongs to the great class of judgements of sameness; and there is nothing more remarkable in making a judgement of sameness in the first person than in the second or the third. The intellectual operations seem essentially alike, whether we say 'I'm the same as I was,' or whether we say 'the pen is the same as it was, yesterday.'; 'No memory is involved in the mere fact of recurrence. The successive editions of a feeling are so many independent events, each snug in its own skin. yesterday's feeling is dead and buried; and the presence of to-day's is no reason why it should be resuscitated along with today's.' William James 1910: *Psychology*, pp. 201, 287-8. However the idea of mechanistically transmitted memory is also found in Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, and Hume's *Treatise*. Borges was to investigate such a possibility in its physical guise in 'La creación y P. H. Gosse', 1974, pp. 650-1: 'En aquel capítulo de su *Logica* que trata de la ley de causalidad, John Stuart Mill razona que el estado del universo en cualquier instante es una consecuencia de su estado en el instante previo y que a una inteligencia infinita le bastaría el conocimiento perfecto de un *solo instante* para saber la historia del universo, pasada y venidera.' Note that Borges' debt to Russell owes nothing to this epistemology, the philosopher implying that such a process would involve an infinite regress, which he rejects: 'It might be maintained that we always know our present experiences; but this cannot be the case if the knowing is something different from the experience. For, if an experience is one thing and knowing it is another, the supposition that we always know an experience when it is happening involves an infinite multiplication of every event. I feel hot; this is one event. I know that I feel hot; this is a second event. I know that I feel hot; this is a third event. And so on *ad infinitum*, which is absurd.' *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, 1950, p. 49. For a discussion of Borges' textual oblivion see Nicolás Rosa, Texto-palimpsesto: memoria y olvido textual. In Blüher, Karl Alfred and Toro, Alfonso de (eds.) 1995, pp. 169-176.

⁴¹ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, pp. 23-4

⁴² I have acquaintances who swear that their lives have been immeasurably improved because they wear chunks of quartz next to their skin, having built an elaborate pseudo-science on the healing qualities of crystals. Of course, when challenged, they retreat into the bastion of their belief-system, convinced that they alone know the truth.

⁴³ Take the example, commonly heard amongst Australian teenagers, of 'Spak!' generally meaning 'I am soundly perplexed by your remark.' No amount of questioning will elicit anything but the vaguest of definitions, and even mounting hostility as the interviewee begins to realise the unsteady ground upon which he or she uses the term.

⁴⁴ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, p. 24.

⁴⁵ Richard Burgin, pp. 28-29. I do not renounce the mind readers' gaudy turban, and even employ some of their biographical chicanery. But then, without some attempt at speculative biography, one might as well be writing technical manuals or cookbooks. As for my justification, it's very slim indeed, resting on Borges' mention of an eponymous prose outline for *Fervor de Buenos Aires* ('Advertencias' p. 172) in 1921 that supplies some evidence, dealing as it does with the themes of philosophical fatalism, the squat, menace of the suburbs, and the eerie geometry of the plazas of Buenos Aires, for his views. See 'Buenos Aires' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 87-91.

⁴⁶ One may note a similarity with what Tzvetan Todorov calls 'the grammarians' debate' over Mallarmé's syntax. What part does the focus of the exegesis have in determining a critical 'product'? Where Paul Bénichou seeks to explain 'the profound motivations of Mallarmé's obscurity' by arriving at the view that 'the strange structure of the sonnet confirms, in a way, the metaphysics that the sonnet professes (Bénichou quoted in Todorov, 1988, p. 127), my own project is devoted first to the demarcation between the grammatical use and poetic use of words in Borges, and then to the combination of the grammatical and poetic modes in analysing their interplay as a possible expression of the symbolic regimen that generates his familiar repertoire in later works. See Tzvetan Todorov 1990a, pp. 126-127. As for the question of just what kind of narrative a poem may be, and thus what rules may be applied to its interpretation, I tend to agree with Samuel R. Levin's conclusion that if the reader accepts the world which the poem itself describes (including of course its *Metaphoric* ascriptions) then he or she is bound to accept the poem as a performative utterance implying that world. See Samuel R. Levin 1976: 'Concerning What kind of Speech Act a Poem Is' in Teun A. Van Dijk (ed) 1976, pp. 141-160, particularly 153.

⁴⁷ As Antonio Planells demonstrates, the symbol of the labyrinth is a culminative image, the development of Borges' literary production that

would continue to evolve throughout his career. See Antonio Planells 1992: *El centro de los laberintos de Borges*, pp. 102-20.

⁴⁸ See Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, p. 107. See also 'El espejo de tinta', 1974, pp. 341-343; 'El espejo de los enigmas', *ibid*, pp. 720-722; 'Los espejos velados', *ibid*, p. 786; 'Los espejos', *ibid*, pp. 814-815; 'Al espejo', *ibid*, p. 1134.

⁴⁹ An 'emblem' can be described as an identifying feature of any object described in text, but not the whole object itself. Thus, in fiction old age may be indicated by any feature commonly associated with it: i.e. creaking furniture, dry and dusty interiors, etc. The 'life of emblems' is the continuous use of certain emblems in varying combinations by which the reader is able to recognise the text as both an individual author's work and the continuity of its [symbolic repertoire](#). See Carl Hausman's discussion of Philip Wheelwright's description of symbol as 'a relatively stable and repeatable element of perceptual experience'. In Carl R. Hausman 1989: *Metaphor and Art: Interactionism and Reference in the Verbal and Nonverbal Arts*, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁰ Of course I have been influenced here by Bertrand Russell's substitutive principle in *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, pp. 194-203. But the reader will notice that while retaining the principle I have redirected it along syntactic lines. The advantage of such a course is obvious, since it avoids the usual objections about semantic interchangeability, even those upon which Derrida mounts his attack on "agrammatical *Sinnlosigkeit*", in 'Signature Event Context'. Obviously, the substituted "Time" is bound by its context and cannot function *sensibly*, even if "put between quotation marks" in Derrida's words, to engender "an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable." ('Signature Event Context', in *Glyph*, Vol. I, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) p. 184. Where Derrida rethinks his position a little below, conceding that "this does imply that the mark is valid (sic) outside of a context" (*loc.cit.*) his new assertion is supported by a shift of attention from the local and logical reading of citationality in Searle to a metalinguistic view of semiosis in general. In this new context he is entitled to ask: "[W]hat would a mark be that could not be cited?" (p. 185) This is exactly my point, that it is only by paying attention to the functional particularity of Borges' use of the word Time in terms of, to use Derrida's words again, "contexts without any center or absolute anchoring" (*loc. cit.*) that his project may

be investigated with a view to throwing light on an individual network of associations unique to the author in question. I shall be considering the question of the local and general, or in Russell's terms, atomic and extended, significance of sentences in a discussion of Borges' objections to [atomicity](#) in Chapter 2.

⁵¹ The contradictions that such a plan throws up are in line with my general argument on the unreadability of "Borges" as a distinct individual, or the product and producer of his œuvre. And although I'm hardly the first person to adopt and promote an "author-function" in place of an author (See Foucault's 'What is an Author?' and *The Order of Things*) my reliance on autobiography and an analysis of analogic relations to underpin it, instead of wider socio-historical effects, is a clear departure from tradition.

⁵² The reader who thinks I've tumbled here into the Affective Fallacy will note that I examine Borges' romantic subjectivity with such dry and tedious care that I could hardly be accused of impressionism or relativism.

⁵³ Such phantom memories are common. I vividly "recall" - more by the act of language than any real connection with a past event - having a Jewish maternal great grandmother. For most of my childhood I believed that I was eligible for immigration to Israel, planned for my new life on a Kibbutz, and was bitterly disappointed when I learned my expectations for an exciting new existence were based on a mistaken spelling of my great grandmother's maiden-name I had received from an alcoholic and unreliable maternal uncle. I have remained vaguely disgruntled, and Anglican, ever since.

⁵⁴ Borges In 'La duración del infierno' in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 238. My translation.

⁵⁵ That is, an empty entity as an object of consciousness, or rather, no entity at all.

⁵⁶ 'We think of the amount we mean either solely as a *name*, or by running over a few salient *dates* therein, with no pretence of imagining the full durations that lie between them.' William James 1910: *Psychology*, p. 283. This use of the word 'intentionality' is in itself conditioned by the particular environment in which it finds itself, that of phenomenology. Used in the context of literary criticism alone it would be utterly inadequate to convey that *other* complex of stylistic, rhetorical and [psychological](#) effects that is usually the apparatus of formalist poetics. See Gregory T. Polletta 1973b: The Writer's

Intention, pp. 185-193. For discussion of just what 'intention' may mean in regard to authorial meaning, see Steven Knapp, and Walter Benn Michaels, 1985: *Against Theory*, pp. 11-30.

⁵⁷ See Edmund Husserl 1964: *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, pp. 22-27. In Husserlian terms this division would entail the postulation of two "meanings," one directed to time as its modality of interval, and another directed to its modality as continuity. Henri Lefebvre, whose *The Production of Space* diagnoses a severely limited perspective in modern epistemology, would violently disagree with me here. Seeing the phenomenological approach as the inundation of the ego in the flux of its own perceptions, he holds Husserl as an accomplice (p. 4), but his argument is too general to be of much use. Which, one may ask, of Husserl's positions is he attacking here; the early mathematical inclination to see understanding as universal, or his developing awareness of the complexity of [psychological](#) phenomena in the *Philosophical Investigations*, a work that does not necessarily preclude the individual arrangement of "meanings" in individuals? I certainly don't claim that Borges is an example of a universal pattern for consciousness, but rather that his perception of the "meanings" that may be ascribed to him evolves through time, being modified by new experiences. Note that I never claim to be giving anything more than a *reading* of Borges, which may be modified in the light of new evidence.

⁵⁸ Borges, 1974, p. 17.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 28. My brackets. To the objection that it is because the word *Tiempo* has a capital letter, indicating it to be no common noun, I would reply that even if it did not, its function as *quasi-personal addressee* would still signal its Super Objectivity.

⁶⁰ See Edmund Husserl 1964, § 24, p. 76. 'Recollection is not expectation; its horizon, which is a posited one, is, however, oriented on the future, that is, the future of the recollected.' Here, of course, the 'recollected' is that mass of mental events which constitutes the totality of intention to the human noise 'time'. See also Wolfgang Iser 1978: *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, pp. 110-12, 135.

⁶¹ And, by implication, we may in the future apply these rules of [substitutional analysis](#) profitably to any writing and establish the author's subject position.

⁶² '[Propositional attitude](#)s' are beliefs. To substantiate my claim that [propositional attitude](#)s can be persistent I would ask the reader to try to

imagine any belief that he or she has held which has not determined a concern operating now. If the reader answers that belief in the Easter Bunny is a case of non-persistent belief I would agree, but the reader would be hard-pressed to deny that the belief in a benevolent and fictitious rabbit which existed for the child, and which has been subsequently shown to be false by experience and experiment for the adult, does not *still* involve a persistent concern centering on the role of the mythical in a child's experience, and the dissolution of the fantastic as an element of character development.

⁶³ Although they may 'condition' the later works this is not to say that their presence will always be detectable. These "themes" are provisional guesses at what might constitute a basic structure for Borges' later *ficciones*, and thus serve as dispensable markers which the dissertation is meant to elaborate and transcend.

⁶⁴ Time is a 'motif' because it occurs as one constituent of each of the four 'themes', other motifs being space, god, woman, death, the city of Buenos Aires, etc. These themes make up the 'main theme' of [ontological](#) unease, or the uncertainty of being, which underlie the totality of Borges' artistic production.

⁶⁵ Borges, 1974, pp. 543-4. For a putative exorcism of time-worn existence see 'La busca de Averroes', *ibid*, p. 588, 'Sentí, en la última página, que mi narración era un símbolo del hombre que yo fuí, mientras la escribía y que, para redactar esa narración, yo tuve que ser aquel hombre y que, para ser aquel hombre, yo tuve que redactar esa narración, y así hasta lo infinito.'

⁶⁶ Borges, *ibid*, p. 17. Cf. Later Borges would eulogise the pampa as well as the city as '[D]os presencias de Dios, dos realidades de tan segura eficacia reverencial que la sola enunciación se sus nombres basta para ensanchar cualquier verso y nos levanta el corazón con júbilo...' (Two presences of God, two realities of such sure reverential efficacy that merely the enunciation of their names suffices to enlarge any verse and raise jubilation in our hearts...), 'La pampa y el suburbio son dioses' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 18. As for the exclusive use by Borges of the masculine pronoun for the universal human subject I can only apologise beforehand for his rampant sexism and deplore such chauvinism.

⁶⁷ I am not, of course, attempting to construct a narrative from the order in which the poems in *Fervor de Buenos Aires* appear, but merely

showing how the contrast between poems can serve to illustrate an argument.

⁶⁸ Borges, 1974, p. 18. See also 'La noche que en el sur lo velaron', 1974, pp. 88-89, where Borges records a vigil for a corpse who is 'incredible', who lies beneath 'indifferent flowers', and whose death reminds the mourners of 'the abundance of reality'. So too the 'Dead of Buenos Aires' in 'Muertes de Buenos Aires', *ibid*, pp. 90-92, where the Recoleta cemetery makes another appearance, surrounded by 'fickle flowers' serve no other purpose than to remind the living of their existential obligation. But cf. 'Forjadura' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1969, p. 131: '[N]ada importa que el alma' (Nothing matters but the soul).

⁶⁹ Borges 'Las calles,' 1974, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Lest the reader think that I'm becoming cloying in my pursuit of intimacy, intimacy as such may simply be regarded here as the condition of proximity that allows one set of conditions (Borges) to make meaningful connection with another set of conditions (Borges' family environment). A prisoner in a cell may be said to be in an intimate relationship with his warder, even though this relationship may involve frequent beatings. For a discussion of intimacy that supports this view see Ted Cohen 1979: [Metaphor](#) and the Cultivation of Intimacy, pp. 1-10.

⁷¹ One can imagine that without an appeal to intimacy the poems would have been received with less enthusiasm, the Ultraists being concerned with aeroplanes and elevators as [Metaphors](#) for technological sacralism, rather than the philosophical religiosity of Borges' earlier poetry.

⁷² It should never be forgotten that Borges was privileged to his father's readings and discussions of the [psychological](#) views of William James throughout his childhood. James, as we know, placed a high premium on the 'warmth and intimacy' that accompanies individual human reflection in the development of the empirical ego, the self that appears to the consciousness of the knower, in howsoever a fleeting instant. William James 1910: *Psychology*, pp. 176, 201.

⁷³ Borges *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 22. Truco is a simplified variant of gin, originally developed by the *gauchos* of the Argentine River Plate from the *ardides* branch of card-games, and still maintained by dedicated followers today. The aim of the game is to not only bluff one's opponents by concealing one's hand, but to also make false

counter-bids when called. Hands and suits are known by elaborate pseudonyms, thus allowing the *truquista* to make coded signals in a secret language. Borges gives a rather metaphysical description in Chapter 4 of *Evaristo Carriego*, taken largely from his essay of the same name in *El Idioma de los argentinos*.

⁷⁴ Borges also employs the theme of cards as symbols for life's exigencies in 'Chapter 3: Las misas herejes', 1974, pp. 121-129.

⁷⁵ *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 22. See also 'Chapter 6b: Páginas complementarias: to Chapter 4; el truco', 1974, pp. 145-147, 'Cuarenta naipes quieren desplazar la vida.'

⁷⁶ As Borges was to explain in a prose essay on the game in 'El Truco' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 29: 'The thing is easy to describe and even to do, but the magic and unpredictability of the game - the fact of playing it - emerges in the outcomes. Forty is the number of the cards, and so 1 by 2 by 3 by 4...by 40, these are the ways in which the hands can be dealt. It is a number delicately punctual in its enormity, with an immediate predecessor and a single successor, but it is never written. It is a remote vertiginous number that seems to dissolve in the chaos of those that shuffle it.' As Maria Corti notes in an exploration of the *Tarot* in Calvino's *Castle of Crossed Destinies* (another example of a vast, yet mathematically definable, range of ludic possibilities for narrative) although each combination produces an outcome, one might also say that for each of these there is an equally valuable alternative that was not selected, thus the Tarot is also the holder of its own negative possibilities: 'Therefore, every plot-line and every story that it constructs is only *provisionally* stable, but potentially interchangeable with all the others.' Maria Corti 1978: *Il viaggio testuale: Le ideologie e le strutture semiotiche*, p. 177. (My translation) Jerry Varsava also notes a similarity of theme and method in Italo Calvino's writing, but suggests that the Borgesian search for literary precursors is handled with more sophistication by both Calvino and Borges in that it forms an unobtrusively deconstructive rationale of the text, unlike so much self-consciously "postmodern" work of the last decade. Jerry Varsava 1990: *The Last Fictions: Calvino's Borgesian Odysseys*. In Edna Aizenberg (ed) 1990: *Borges and his Successors: The Borgesian Impact on Literature and the Arts*, p. 186.

⁷⁷ Borges *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 22.

⁷⁸ Borges has often repeated his repetitions, the somnolent recurrence of trivial incident acting to reiterate a future which cannot be escaped.

As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan points out, 'Emma Zunz' a story that Borges was to create in early maturity, allows him to play with the notion of re-enactment as reiteration. See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan 1987: 'Narration as Repetition: the Case of Günter Grass' *Cat and Mouse*, p. 178.

⁷⁹ Borges *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 22.

⁸⁰ I don't consider questions of Borges' chauvinism to be of overwhelming importance for the discussion, a view apparently shared by many feminist critics currently working in Latin American literature. Therefore I respectfully leave future feminist criticism of Borges in more capable hands: those of Carol Maier, Doris Meyer, Margarite Fernández Olmos, Gloria Waldman or Helène Anderson for example. For a surprisingly Borges-free view of feminism in Latin America, see Debra A. Castillo 1992: *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁸¹ Martin C. Stabb 1970, pp. 35-6.

⁸² Borges in "An Autobiographical Essay" p. 215.

⁸³ I am obviously using attitude in its formal sense here, as the author's relationship to his material, and its use as *implementa significationis*. This can also be demonstrated using David Harrah's discussion of Formal Message Theory (FMT) where Borges' use of the word 'time' operates at various levels at various times. I would argue on the evidence I present that *time* as a word is chiefly an operant at Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 (the formal, semantic, hybrid-expressive and codificational) and to a lesser extent at Levels 5 and 6 (utterance-types and utterance tokens) since whether a word is used as a token or type relies on its selection from a background which in itself is often indistinguishable from the macrostructure (see Thomas T. Ballmer 1976: 'Macrostructures' in Teun A. Van Dijk [ed] pp. 1-2) wherein it resides. See David Harrah 1976: 'Formal Message Theory and Non-Formal Discourse' in Teun A. Van Dijk (ed) 1976, 59-76.

⁸⁴ Borges, *El arte narrativo y la magia*, in *Discusión*, p. 232.

⁸⁵ For a theory of acceptance that I have provisionally sanctioned as the basis of Borges' 'acceptance' of those conditions under which he should agree to when considering the syntactic capability of words, see Verdaasdonk, Hugo 1976: 'Concepts of Acceptance and the Basis of a Theory of Texts' in Teun A. Van Dijk (ed) 1976, pp. 179-228. Briefly, and after a great deal of deductive proof, Verdaasdonk shows that 'acceptance' is distinct from the concepts of agreement, proof, etc, in

that it must involve a pragmatics of reading that depends on external conditions of corroboration for its reception (p. 224). Would these conditions apply to Borges, say, in reading one of his own *fictions* aloud? Yes, but only so far as his reading could be corroborated by external sources of comment, say learned articles and criticisms. On this account Borges' understanding of the formal (syntactical) aspect of words as constituting their use is also corroborated by dictionaries and grammars that support it. For discussion of the concept of acceptance at the level of semantics (in the case of answers to questions which are semantically non-equivalent, but which require back-ground information to complete their acceptability conditions) see Judith and Jean-Claude Milner 1975: *Interrogations, reprises, dialogue*. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975: *Langue, discours, société: Pour Émile Benveniste*, pp. 122-148.

⁸⁶ As Naomi and Asa Kasher note, the selection of a theory of speech acts for application is always based on some criterion that is, or can be shown to be, strictly outside its terms of reference. Indeed, the act of selection always implies an opacity for interpretation since one must choose before one acts. Thus, I have contextualised Borges' utterances in this case on the basis of a number of possible contextualisations on the theme of personal identity which recurred while we were in the act of interpretation. See Naomi and Asa Kasher 1976: 'Speech Acts, Contexts and Valuable Ambiguities' in Teun A. Van Dijk (ed) 1976, pp. 77-78, especially 79.

⁸⁷ Adena Rosmarin comments that in dealing with a theory of representation in literature one is also dealing with a theory of convention. And it is only by keeping the convention in mind that the utterance can be given its performative value. Adena Rosmarin 1985a: *On the theory of "Against Theory"*, pp. 80-88.

⁸⁸ I agree that such an explanation sounds improbable, but the reader should remember that it is merely an attempt to read the early poetry as the epistemological foundation for Borges' later narratives, and does not propose to be an exclusive account. If the reader feels that it sounds improbable then he or she must also accept one of the two following propositions: 1) That Borges' 'production' only begins with the prose narratives and that all his early poetry is of no consequence; and 2) That Borges' poetry was written without any intellectual content and that it is merely an attempt to 'write poetically' and therefore functions as nothing more than a stylistic apprenticeship. Personally, I find both

these propositions even less probable than the wildest connections I could make in this dissertation.

⁸⁹ Borges, 1974, p. 27. 'This poem is about a house Borges lived in on Bulnes Street in the early 'twenties.' Norman Thomas Giovanni in *Selected Poems (1923-1967)*. Edited by N. T. di Giovanni. Various Translators. New York 1972; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1972, Notes, p. 310.

⁹⁰ Ibid. The thought of being trapped in an eternal mirror-relation is finally accepted, although repugnantly in 'Borges y Yo', 1974, p. 808. But mirrors can also provide existential alternatives. In 'Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva' Borges describes his grandmother's experiences in encountering a wild girl raised by indians, as 'un espejo monstruoso de su destino...' (a monstrous mirror of her destiny) 'Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva', 1974, p. 559.

⁹¹ Contrasting with this view, familiar surroundings can be a haven for retreat from the immensity of the universe, as in the case of the patio where the poet takes refuge from the 'dispersed lights' of stars that he cannot 'order into constellations', 'El sur' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 19.

⁹² Norman Thomas Giovanni 1972, Notes, p. 310.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 310.

⁹⁴ Briefly, the editorial staff and contributors of the avant-garde literary review *Martín Fierro* divided into two opposing ideological wings from 1920 to 1922, the Boedistas being named after a northern working-class district where several writers lived, (and subsequently inclined politically left), and the Floridistas who lived, or congregated, downtown in the fashionable cafés of the Calle Florida. For an account of the schism set against the politically-charged atmosphere of the time, see Beatriz Sarlo 1993, pp. 100-103.

⁹⁵ Norman Thomas Giovanni 1972, p. 310.

⁹⁶ See Theodore Ziolkowski 1977: *Disenchanted Images: A Literary Iconology*, p. 162.

⁹⁷ Borges in "An Autobiographical Essay" p. 207.

⁹⁸ Borges, 1974, p. 18.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 1974, p. 35. As Cintio Vitier notes: 'Pero esa usurpación es la que asegura la continuidad de la vida.' Vitier, Cintio 1945: En torno a la poesía de Jorge Luis Borges. *Orígenes*. Vol. 2, no. 6, pp. 39.

¹⁰⁰ Borges, 1974, p. 35.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 35.

¹⁰² Rosas, Juan Manuel de (1793-1877), Argentine dictator of the 1830s and '40s. Born in Buenos Aires, Rosas belonged to a family prominent there under Spanish rule. Amassing great wealth as a cattleman and beef exporter during the period of Argentina's fledgling independence, he emerged as a military strongman, or *caudillo*, and champion of the country's conservative aristocracy, in 1827. From 1829 to 1832 he was governor of Buenos Aires Province, opposing progressive political factions and favouring provincial autonomy. In 1833 he led a successful campaign against the Indians of southern Argentina and two years later was reinstated as governor with dictatorial powers. Supported by the Mazorca, an organisation that terrorised his liberal Unitario opponents, Rosas formed alliances with the strongmen who dominated the other Argentine provinces, winning for himself control of the nation's foreign affairs and external trade. In 1843 he intervened in a civil war in neighbouring Uruguay, arousing fears of Argentine expansionism. Great Britain and France retaliated by blockading Buenos Aires, but Rosas persevered. In 1851 Justo Urquiza (1800-70), a former supporter of Rosas, led a rebellion against him backed by Brazil and Uruguay. Ousted in 1852, Rosas spent the rest of his life in exile and died in England.

¹⁰³ Borges 'Rosas' *Obras completas*, 1974, pp. 28-9.

¹⁰⁴ 'When I was writing this poem I was not unaware that one of my grandfather's grandfathers was one of Rosas' forebears. The fact is unimportant if we remember how small our country's population was and the rather incestuous nature of our history.' Postface *Obras completas*, p. 52. My translation. See also Manuel Mujica Lainez, 1964: Borges et les ancêtres, and Carlos T. de Pereira Lahitte, 1964: Généalogie de Jorge Luis Borges both In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 151-155 & 156-158.

¹⁰⁵ Borges, 1974, pp. 28-9.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 28-9.

¹⁰⁷ Whether or not this rationality exists is a difficult point to prove, but it is always the critic's starting point, even when the rationality is of an 'evangelical' kind. See Richard Blackmur 1973: *A Burden for Critics*. In Gregory T. Polletta (ed) 1973, p. 69.

¹⁰⁸ Among these logical conditions is a general reverence for all life, including the dictator Rosas, whose political crimes seem to be forgiven by Borges here. By this I mean not to deny Borges an individual pantheism, but to pursue a determinist approach to the

conceptual vocabulary which helps construct it: one can obviously express a generalised pantheism while foregrounding it against individual constituting instances. As Borges remarks ironically of a scientific dogma of the time: 'El individuo no es inmortal, pero sí la especie y ella garantiza la inmortalidad de todo sentir.' 'Las coplas de Jorge Manrique' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁹ Gene Bell-Villada, 1981, p. 47.

¹¹⁰ Loc cit. and see Tzvetan Todorov 1970: *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, p. 116.

¹¹¹ Is Borges developing a narrative rationale that he would later use as a way of constructing an ambivalent subject-position? Rawdon Wilson identifies Borges' bi-narrative position as both narrator and narratee in the *ficciones* as a 'godgame' that may have indeed been suggested by the contingency of described environments. How better to allow the narrator to melt into his or her surroundings than to bring these into the foreground as a series of puzzling emergences (one thinks immediately of the iron coins of Tlön) while simultaneously reducing the role of the narrator to that of a bemused and evanescent spectator? See Rawdon R. Wilson 1990: *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game, and Narrative Theory*, pp. 132-134.

¹¹² It should be stressed that Borges is not using 'whiteness' in a racially informed sense, but rather as an image of intangible mystery. For an interesting discussion of *whiteness* as a regimen for racial codification in Henry James, Poe, Melville etc, see Toni Morrison 1992: *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, passim. See also Frank Kermode 1983: *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 109.

¹¹³ Borges, 'El arte narrativo y la magia' in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 229. As Tzvetan Todorov notes, quoting Anatole France, this quality of allusiveness, of suggestibility, was to be the heart of the new poetics. (Tzvetan Todorov 1982a: *Symbolism and Interpretation*, p. 88.) But perhaps Borges is also indulging in a little retro-postmodernism, as Umberto Eco implies in *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* when he remarks on the pregnant hiatus of Poe's conclusion that "allows" the reader to supply the text with a range of meanings beyond the rude accumulation of its [emblem](#):

'[A]nd now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow.'

Quoted in Umberto Eco 1994, pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁴ Borges in "An Autobiographical Essay" p. 218.

¹¹⁵ But what I'm calling an immanentist position, which is actually only the *suggestion* of the power of words that the poet feels in the act of expression, is not merely a sensation of wonderment, but the expression of a conjunction between the lexical and allusive worlds: 'Even if the indirect meaning is apparently present, as is the case for example with [Metaphors](#) of the *in presentia* type, the very fact of bringing together the two meanings, can be interpreted in countless ways... Comparison is inherently double, with an antecedent (discursive) equivalence and a consequent (symbolic) equivalence, to use Paul Henle's terms.' Tzvetan Todorov 1982a: *Symbolism and Interpretation*, p. 80.

¹¹⁶ 'Sur l'évolution littéraire' in Stéphane Mallarmé 1945: *Œuvres Complètes*. Paris: NRF, p. 870.

¹¹⁷ A very Aristotelian point of view, as William Gass notes in *The Concept of Character in Fiction*. In Gregory T. Polletta (ed) 1973, (1973a) p. 700.

¹¹⁸ 'Sur l'évolution littéraire' p. 870.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 870.

¹²⁰ 'Sur Poe' in Stéphane Mallarmé 1945, p. 872. See also M. M. Bakhtin/P. N. Medvedev 1978: *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle, p. 57 ff.

¹²¹ No doubt his reading of Bergson influenced him here. Take his thoughts on the succession of mental images of quantity giving us our sense of space: 'When it is said that an object occupies a large space [...] we ought to understand by this simply that its image has altered the shade of a thousand perceptions or memories, and that in this sense it pervades them, although it does not itself come into view. But this wholly dynamic way of looking at things is repugnant to the

reflective consciousness, because the latter delights in clean cut distinctions, and in things with well-defined outlines, like those which are perceived in space.' Henri Bergson, 1910 [Eighth impression 1971]: *Time and Free Will*, p. 9. Slightly altered. Is Borges here describing, extending the argument to the way narrative is fashioned, anything less than the distinction between 'natural' and 'magical' causality?

¹²² This determinism is not, however, strictly logical since, as will become obvious from further discussion, it involves practical considerations like points of view and goals of agents. See Ingrid and Werner Kummer 1976: 'Logic of Action and the Structure of Practical Arguments' in Teun A. Van Dijk (ed) 1976, 83-106. Although Mary Lusky Friedman, relying on a reading of Borges' mature fictions and ignoring much of the earlier foundational criticism and poetry, finds the effect unconvincing (*The Emperor's Kites* p. 146) Borges' aesthetic programme is still quite consistent with his later views on the role of punctuating imagery in fiction, and thus must be taken seriously as the basis for his narrative production. See Mary Lusky Friedman 1987: *The Emperor's Kites: A Morphology of Borges' Tales*. Durham: Duke University Press.

¹²³ Borges, 'El arte narrativo y la magia' in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 232.

¹²⁴ As Thomas, H. Hart remarks, 'Borges' theory of the autonomy of the literary work is a consequence of his more general theory that man can never truly know reality.' Thomas H. Hart 1990: 'The Literary Criticism of Jorge Luis Borges' in Richard Macksey (ed.) 1974, p. 290.

¹²⁵ 1969 'Prólogo' to *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 13. Borges is, however, more fulsome in his praise of Unamuno, although still critical of his use of metre, in 'Acerca de Unamuno, poeta' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 109-116.

¹²⁶ See "An Autobiographical Essay" pp. 223-225; *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, pp. 12, 78, 123, 157. For a magical evocation of the city, and Borges as the nightbird ('La noche es el milagro trunco: la culminación de los macilentos faroles y el tiempo en que la objetividad palpable se hace menos insolente y menos maciza.' p. 87) see 'Buenos Aires' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 87-91.

¹²⁷ See Rose Corral, 1994: 'Acerca del "Primer Borges"'. *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispanica*, 42:1, 151-159.

¹²⁸ 'La esfera de Pascal' in *Otras inquisiciones*, 1974, p. 638. Of course, one can find a past echo of this in Nietzsche, in Foucault, etc.

Georges Poulet's 1966 *The Metamorphoses of the Circle* is a particularly fine example of the extension of this idea throughout history. In a lecture that Borges prepared for the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores (CLES) in Buenos Aires in March 1949 on American literature he was to view American letters through the prism of an eternal [Metaphor](#); dreams as the theatre of representations, declaring: 'Las verdaderas, las que formulan íntimas conexiones entre una imagen y otra, han existido siempre; las que aún podemos inventar son las falsas, las que no vale la pena inventar.' In 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', 1974, p. 670.

¹²⁹ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, 1982, pp. 164-165. As Alastair Fowler comments: 'It may help to distinguish different sorts of indeterminacy. (1) First, there is the indeterminacy inherent in all language, in that words do not have fully determined meanings...[and] (2) There is indeterminacy in Ingarden's sense, meaning places of indeterminacy, gaps in representation, especially of fictional objects.' For Ingarden's sense to be valid Borges' comments would have to relate to himself as a fictional object. See Alastair Fowler 1982: *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*, p. 267.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 164-165. As for the paucity of [Metaphors](#), Borges was to stick to his opinion time and again. In an early review of Manuel Maples Arce's *Andiamos interiores* (1922) he comments: 'The author talks about having created *rejuvenated Metaphors*. In my opinion it isn't possible to construct [Metaphors](#) that are fully new. In all the multiply discursive history of Castilian letters I don't think there are more than thirty or so that actually have enough inside them for the creation of anything new.' My translation. 'Acotaciones' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 130.

¹³¹ As Jenny Simonin-Grumbach notes there is a need to integrate speech practices as part of linguistic studies (p. 85) as it is sometimes only through these practices that the kinds of modalities with which I'm dealing in my treatment of Borges can be discerned: 'The signification power of language results from the articulation of two orders of signification: that of semiotics, which is the language as a series of signs, and that of semantics, or speech acts, at rest within the capacity of language to serve as an interpretant of other semiotic systems.' (My translation.) See Jenny Simonin-Grumbach 1975: Pour une typologie des discours. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975, pp. 85-121.

¹³² Borges *Obras completas*, 1974, pp. 28-29.

¹³³ "He" is transhistorical because he cannot be called to account for his crimes, and therefore seems to exist for Borges as a logical idea rather than a real person to whom guilt (which is always historical) may be ascribed. As for any argument based on the special place of poetry in discourse ('A poem is closer to common speech than it is to non-literary discursive writing.' Graham Hough 1976: 'An Eighth Type of Ambiguity', p. 240.) I can only claim that if this is true, then we should find it easier to communicate in iambic pentameters than we do presently.

¹³⁴ Borges employs this genetic causalism in 'El muerto' where the narrative is recounted by a 'dead' man (i.e. doomed to die). In 'El muerto', 1974, pp. 545-549. 'La otra muerte' seems to reverse genetic causalism by proposing an undoable past, yet it more justly creates a multiplicity of causalities each imbued with its moment of divergence. 'La otra muerte', 1974, pp. 571-575; 'La espera', 1974, pp. 608-611.

¹³⁵ See Carter Wheelock's definition of myth as the potential of abstraction: for Borges it would seem that the familiarity of an intimate environment becomes the ground upon which historical experience is projected and actualised. See Carter Wheelock 1969: *The Mythmaker: A Study of Motif And Symbol In The Short Stories of Jorge Luis Borges*, p. 23.

¹³⁶ Borges, *Obras completas*, 1974, pp. 28-29. As Jonathan Tittler notes such a strategy is 'kinetically' ironic, since it relies on the accumulation of popular mis-receptions to fashion the historical text of 'Rosas'. See *Narrative Irony in the Contemporary Spanish-American Novel*. 1984, p. 144.

¹³⁷ '...twice in my life I have had the experience of being in a timeless world. That was given to me only twice throughout my life. I had been very happy one day - I suddenly felt that I was outside time. I don't know how long it lasted. It was a very strange experience.' In *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, 1982, p. 167. Also see *Ibid*, pp. 72-3, 11. In a postface to 'Hell's Duration' in *Discusión* Borges gives another description of this experience, finding himself in a closed room with only a chink of light falling on the table, he thinks, '... ¿dónde estoy? y comprendí que no lo sabía. Pensé ¿quién soy? y no me pude reconocer. El miedo creció en mí. Pensé: esta vigilia desconsolada ya es el infierno, esta vigilia sin destino será mi eternidad. Entonces desperté de veras: temblando.' In 'La duración del infierno' in

Discusión, 1974, p. 238. Willis Barnstone comments on this experience as ecstatic and anagnoretic (re-acknowledging) and endorses its lexical dependency. Willis Barnstone 1983: *The Poetics of Ecstasy: Varieties of Ekstasis from Sappho to Borges*, pp. 82-3. See also Northrop Frye 1963: *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, p. 25.

Endnotes to Chapter Two

138 Borges in *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, 1982, p. 34.

¹³⁹ 'He dado en escritor, en crítico, y debo confesar (no sin lástima y conciencia de mi pobreza) que releo con un muy recordativo placer y que las lecturas nuevas no me entusiasman.' Borges in 'La fruición literaria' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 102.

¹⁴⁰ This is not meant to contradict Borges' lack of 'visuality' after *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, but merely to make plain that where objects in the early poems are described in lovingly exact detail, it is the relationship of the characters with the objects of their particular visual fields, rather than the objects themselves, which are privileged in the later narratives. This 'visuality' is transferred from a function of the author to that of the narrated percipients within the *fictions*.

¹⁴¹ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, p. 34.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 165-6.

¹⁴³ For a linguistic approach to the functionality of the [emblem](#), see I. A. Richards 1974: 'What is Belief?' in *Poetries, Their Media and their Ends*, pp. 234-241.

¹⁴⁴ I have coined the term "imagic" to describe this process by combining *image* and *magic*, "imaginary" having an undesirably psychological taint.

¹⁴⁵ See Roland Barthes: 'Textual analysis: Poe's "Valdemar"' in David Lodge (ed) 1988b: *Modern Criticism and Theory*. London: Longman, p. 192. [Originally published 1968] For a polemical counter-blast to French structuralism, see Leo Bersani 1973: From Bachelard to Barthes. In Gregory T. Polletta (ed) 1973, pp. 87-103.

¹⁴⁶ Borges in 'El arte narrativo y la magia,' 1974, p. 232, translation by Martin C. Stabb, *Jorge Luis Borges*, 1970, pp. 75-6.

¹⁴⁷ I'll pursue a more thorough reading of the element through Borges' discussion of the appearance of 'whiteness' in 19th century American literature. The Russian formalists seem to duplicate Borges' own ideas,

particularly in their location of the *ideologeme* as a structural element in narrative that functions to give structural cohesion to the particular narrative in which it appears. But it is possible, I believe, to argue for the separability of the 'element' in a Borgesian *fiction* and therefore privilege the 'life of elements' with an independent existence which can be appropriated by succeeding narratives. This is certainly the case where Borges' *fictions* recirculate key images over a number of years and in a number of different collections.

¹⁴⁸ 'Caminata' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 43.

¹⁴⁹ Not to mention industrial modernism's literary analogue - one must at the same time pay a debt to, and overthrow, one's forebears. As André Marcel d'Ans notes: 'Côté influences enfin, l'ombre de Verlaine sortant des brumes de Carrière, ne doit pas nous masquer les responsabilités génésiques du Parnasse et du Symbolisme français vis-à-vis du modernisme dont nous aurons ainsi complété le croquis.' André Marcel d'Ans 1964: Jorge Luis Borges et la poésie d'Amérique. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 145.

¹⁵⁰ Beatriz Sarlo 1993: *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge*, p.10. See also Evar Méndez 1927: Doce poetas nuevos. *Síntesis*. Vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 25-27. But even so Borges could find the picturesque, even the symbolic, in this infernal new landscape: 'En la pampa, un gaucho y el diablo payaron juntos; en Buenos Aires no ha sucedido aún nada y no acredita su grandeza ni un símbolo ni una asombrosa fábula ni siquiera un destino individual equiparable al *Martín Fierro*. Ignoro si una voluntad divina se realiza en el mundo, pero si existe fueron pensados en Ella el almacén rosado y esta primavera tupida y el gasómetro rojo. (¡Qué gran tambor de Juicios Finales ese último!) Borges in 'Después de las imágenes' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 31.

¹⁵¹ Can Borges, whose life was so intimately tied to his familial surroundings, be seen strictly as Benjamin's *flâneur*, whose life is a mediated product of the institutions with which he deals every day? Borges' life is rather that of the voyaging intellectual recluse who takes a little air-bubble of intellectual independence with him wherever he goes. While the *flâneur* is a product of the metropolis, Borges is aloof from it, finding the city's relentless modernity as false as the rural criollismo, which when transformed into the port dialect of lunfardo, constitutes a 'technology of the yoke and halter'. 'Invectiva contra el arrabalero' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 136. My translation. Because Benjamin's determinations of the *flâneur* are meant to be

seen *allegorically and poetically* rather than literally, it becomes strictly impossible, and unnecessary, to locate this image as solely a historical phenomenon. See Hannah Arendt 1969: Introduction to Benjamin 1969, pp. 13, 21-22, 43. Diagnosing Borges' *flânerie* becomes a game of shifting mirrors, especially if Benjamin's irony is taken into account. Shall Borges be a *flâneur* because of his refusal to be drawn completely into the life of the café, or despite of it? Rather as a Benjaminian 'destructive character' his attitude is always cheerful and his outlook optimistic as he stands at the cross-roads, seeing labyrinthine ways everywhere. And despite efforts to the contrary, the opposition of the intellectual and political orientations of the two men cannot be read as congruent, even if both Benjamin and Borges have seen the 'labyrinth' as a central [Metaphor](#) of their own being. See Susan Sontag 1979: Introduction to Walter Benjamin 1979: *One-Way Street*, pp. 10-11, 26-7. As Gabriel Josipovici notes, quoting Benjamin, the *flâneur* as the rag picker of history is a figure without convictions, and therefore of doubtful applicability to a Borges seeking an authentic poetic voice. Josipovici, Gabriel 1977: *The Lessons of Modernism, and Other Essays*, p. 57. For Borges' ambivalence to the preoccupations of the *flâneur*, see Estela Cedola, 1994: Borges et la ferveur de Buenos Aires. In Benôit Melançon and Pierre Popovic, *Montréal 1642-1992: Le grand passage*. Montréal: XYZ, pp. 176-185.

¹⁵² 'Caminata' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 43.

¹⁵³ *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 22.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 1974, p. 43.

¹⁵⁵ This word has the original sense of heartbeat, but modern Spanish has diluted it into something like the English intuition or hunch.

¹⁵⁶ *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 22. The image recurs in 'Calle Desconocida' *Ibid*. p. 20.

¹⁵⁷ I'm of course using the term 'intentionality' in a special sense, both logical and rhetorical. As David Newton de Molina points out in the Introduction to his edition of critical essays on the subject, there is much that is logical in literary criticism, '...but the logic is very often the logic peculiar to literary criticism.' in David Newton de Molina 1974: 'Introduction', p. ix. But can my claims for Borges' use of a Time as the bearer of a hidden intentionality be reconciled to any transferable intentionality implicit in the text? Mark Spilka opts for a *formal* link between the author and his works as one way out of the dilemma (p. 209). Here there is no need to indulge in constructive psychoanalytics,

since the mounting body of evidence merely points to demonstrable assumptions about the way the author regularly uses certain words (p. 214). Frank Cioffi's attack on anti-intentionalism is based on well-known contradictions in Wimsatt and Beardsley's manifesto, but takes the 'eliminative' position that the careful sifting of textual references against the author's biographical data gives sufficient ground for the author's most probable intent to be gauged (p. 221). I have attempted to use both these insights in the present work on Borges, which opts for a combined position that might be called 'eliminative formalism'. See Mark Spilka 1973: *The Necessary Stylist: A New Critical Revision*; Frank Cioffi 1973: *Intention and Interpretation in Criticism*, pp. 207-215 and 215-233 respectively.

¹⁵⁸ 'Caminata' in *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 43. For a later investigation of this theme see 'El sueño de Coleridge', 1974, pp. 642-645. See also John Drew 1987: *India and the Romantic Imagination*, pp. 206-7.

¹⁵⁹ As A. D. Nuttall comments, 'Berkeley's ambition was to reassert the claims of experience. But in 'correcting' the error of his predecessors he did not disdain to use their terms, and thus to use their thoughts. 'Experience', for Berkeley, meant the way things taste, smell, etc. That is all experience is and (except for the thinking subject) there is nothing else. But tasting, smelling, etc. are things that go on in the mind. Berkeley is far too imbued with the spirit of his century to believe that the objects of mental tasting, etc, if immediate, could be other than in the mind themselves. Thus, for Berkeley, empiricism *is* idealism; or, to put it another way, *esse est aut percipere aut percipi*.' A. D. Nuttall 1974: *A Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination*. London: Chatto and Windus for University Sussex Press.

¹⁶⁰ 'Caminata' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 43.

¹⁶¹ Martin C. Stabb 1970, p. 37.

¹⁶² Gene Bell-Villada, 1981: *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, p. 23.

¹⁶³ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, 1982, p. 92. See also William H. Gass 1987: *Imaginary Borges and His Books*. In Alazraki 1987b: (ed.) *Critical Essays on Jorge Luis Borges*. Boston: G. K. Hall and Co, pp. 108-116.

¹⁶⁴ Beatriz Sarlo 1993: *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge*, p. 67. This is the opposite of phenomenology's diffusion of selves. The Tlönista cannot be, in Poulet's phrase, 'on loan to another' (p. 107) because the "I" of subjectivity would have to be composed of all the

verbs that allow it to be, or all the adjectives that can be attached to it. See Georges Poulet 1973: *Phenomenology of Reading*. In Gregory T. Polletta (ed) 1973, pp. 103-119. Geoffrey H. Hartman uses what might be called Poulet's *subjective ventriloquism* (where one ego is always at a little distance away in the act of reading, calling winsomely to its master-ego) to support the case for the Tlönistas against the formalists. Geoffrey H. Hartman 1973: *Beyond Formalism*, pp. 168-172. But how is this "I" to be allowed a voice? How is it to "admonish" the socio-political climate in which it finds itself? For a critique of Hartman's naive *radicalisation* of art as a force for social change, see Michael Sprinkler 1983: *Aesthetic Criticism: Geoffrey Hartman*. In Jonathan Arac; Wlad Godzich; Wallace Martin (eds) 1983: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, pp. 43-65.

¹⁶⁵ See Genette on the comment by French rhetorician César Dumarsais that a large number of these tropes 'actually duplicate the literal word instead of making up for its absence.' Gérard Genette 1982b: *Figures of Literary Discourse*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁶ One need hardly comment that this is the central theme of much of Borges' short fictional work, including 'The Circular Ruins' and 'The Secret Miracle', an idea which finds its most personal expression in Gustav Meyrink's *The Golem* a novel that Borges used to teach himself German prose in Geneva.

¹⁶⁷ The world is held in place by the perceiver, but the perceiver too may be perceived by another perceiver, and so on *ad infinitum*, until the act of perception itself becomes logically impossible since it relies on a basic distinction between perceiver and perceived dissolving in a miasma of inter-subjectification.

¹⁶⁸ Borges, 1974, p. 43.

¹⁶⁹ This position cannot, however, relieve the individual of his or her responsibilities to existence. As Borges notes in 'Historia de los ecos de un nombre', 1974, pp. 753: 'Precisamente por haber escrito *El mundo como voluntad y como representación*, Schopenhauer sabía muy bien que ser un pensador es tan ilusorio como ser un enfermo o un desdénado y que él era otra cosa, profundamente.' Borges had arrived at this opinion of Schopenhauer's dilemma as early as 1925: 'El yo no existe. Schopenhauer, que parece arrimarse muchas veces a esa opinión la desmiente tácitamente, otras tantas, no sé si adrede o si forzado a ello por esa basta y zafia metafísica - o más bien ametafísica

-, que acecha en los principios del language.' See 'La nadería de la personalidad' in *Inquisiciones*, p. 102.

¹⁷⁰ Borges would attempt to resolve this contradiction by resorting to encapsulated narrative domains as a means of confusing levels of existence and throwing inquiry off the scent. Not even *nirvana* gets off the hook, Borges remarking on the story of Siddhartha that it is by constantly fashioning recursive objectivities in existence that Siddhartha dissolves himself in these interminably recreated, and ultimately worthless and therefore illusory, worlds. See Borges' comments on the unreality of *nirvana* in Herman Rapaport, 1990: Borges, De Man, and the Deconstruction of Reading. In Edna Aizenberg (ed) 1990: *Borges and his Successors: The Borgesian Impact on Literature and the Arts*, p. 149.

¹⁷¹ Borges *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 38.

¹⁷² Strangely, Borges never considered passive dreaming as an act of consciousness. For Borges the exercise of will is crucial: God is an active willing toward some end. Even in the dream-ficción 'The Circular Ruins' the dreamer is trapped within a sustained act of consciousness.

¹⁷³ See Martin C. Stabb 1970, pp. 34-5; Gene Bell-Villada, 1981: *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, p. 29.

¹⁷⁴ Or more probably he saw nothing of the sort and just enjoyed the interplay of these two ideas. As Gene Bell-Villada puts it: 'For his non literary readings, Borges amuses himself with mystic writers, dabbles in Jung, and loves Schopenhauer; these speculative thinkers spun highly provocative fancies and conceits, but their contributions to fruitful, significant knowledge were in the end minimal.' Gene Bell-Villada, 1981: *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, p. 266.

¹⁷⁵ George Berkeley 1954: *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, p. 100.

¹⁷⁶ See 'Una vindicación del falso Basílides' in *Discusión*, 1974, pp. 213-216; 'Una postulación de la realidad' in *Discusión*, 1974, pp. 217-221.

¹⁷⁷ The image of the parvenu creator occurs as integral to such classics as 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' where our world is slowly transformed by intrusions from an alternate world of philosophical idealists, 'Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote' where a literary nonentity recreates parts of Cervantes' masterpiece, 'Las Ruinas Circulares' where a 'world' is only kept in existence by the haphazard activity of a few percipients, and so

on. As to the critique of intellectual and literary genesis offered by W. K. Wimsatt that '[T]here is no theoretical or critical term set up for the purpose of clarifying or recommending a given perspective which is not susceptible to being seen and used in an opposite light.') I can only claim that it is extremely difficult to mount a case *against* the view that I express in my search for thematic motivation in Borges' works and remain consistent to either the author's own statements or received readings of his production. See W. K. Wimsatt 1976: 'Genesis: A Fallacy Revived.', p. 116.

¹⁷⁸ Arthur Schopenhauer 1958: *The World as Will and Representation Vol. II*, p. 349. (Nature is not divine, but daimonical) My parentheses.

¹⁷⁹ *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 39. The 'blind' in this context are obviously the city's sleepers.

¹⁸⁰ As an indication of the tenuousness of Borges' reputation as a poet, if not as a writer of short narratives, the following representative sample of anthologies fails to mention him even in these enlightened times, despite including such South American poets as Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, León Felipe Camino, César Vallejo and Antonio Cisneros, and also despite the fact that both Barnstone and Steiner have published on Borges. See Stanley Burnshaw (ed) 1964: *The Poem Itself: 150 European Poems Translated and Analysed*. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books. [Originally published 1960]; Steiner, George (ed) 1970: *Poem Into Poem: World Poetry in Modern Verse Translation*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books; Jon Silkin (ed) 1973: *Poetry of the Committed Individual: A Stand Anthology of Poetry*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books; Barnstone Willis (ed) 1966: *Modern European Poetry*. London: Bantam Books.

¹⁸¹ From 'Amanecer' *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 52. Borges might have just as easily noted that 'Amanecer' was a declaration of his puzzlement over the nature and practice of philosophical idealism, casting forth to 'The Circular Ruins' and 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' for its most creative formulation. See Gene Bell-Villada, 1981: *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, pp. 9-10, 34, 35, 36, 37; The Colombian Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez has stated: 'Borges is one of the authors whom I most read - and whom I probably like the least...he is a writer I cannot stand. And yet I love the violin he makes use of for expressing language...' Ibid. p. 36. Yet, despite Márquez' back-handed salute Borges is usually acknowledged as an

essential, but superable, ingredient in the Colombian's thematic repertoire. See Cesare Segre 1969: *I Segni e la Critica*, p. 288.

¹⁸² *Obras completas*, p. 38. Borges is probably referring to an unsettling intimation of eternity that he believed he experienced on waking one night: 'Pensé: esta vigilia desconsolada ya es el infierno, esta vigilia sin destino será mi eternidad. Entonces desperté de veras: temblando.' In 'La duración del infierno' in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 238. See his denial of the succession of time in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', 1974, p. 767. 'Sentirse en muerte' (On finding oneself dead) is divided into two 'esquinas' or corners, each one of which reminds the reader of Raskolnikov's disquieting intuition that hell and eternity may be 'nothing more than a dirty little corner' in *Crime and Punishment*.

¹⁸³ 'Amanecer' *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 52.

¹⁸⁴ For a similar treatment of metaphysical foliage, see Miller, J. Hillis 1973: An Introduction to William Carlos Williams, p. 135. For a critique of Miller's *reductio mente scriptoris* see Donald Pease 1983: J. Hillis Miller: The Other Victorian at Yale. In Jonathan Arac; Wlad Godzich; Wallace Martin (eds) 1983: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, pp. 66-89.

¹⁸⁵ Borges, 1974, pp. 21 and 49 respectively.

¹⁸⁶ *Obras completas*, 1974, p. 21.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 21.

¹⁸⁸ *Loc. cit*, p. 21.

¹⁸⁹ In one of the first images of the labyrinth as a construct not only of geometry, but of human signification (the main incarnation of the Zahir) Borges asks us to imagine a nightmarish, cubic, labyrinthine acrostic on the tail-gate of a cart trundling down a Buenos Aires lane 'Chapter 7: Las inscripciones de los carros', 1974, p. 148.

¹⁹⁰ "It may be a valid generalisation to say that in all his writing, Borges seeks out the passive and manageable facets of reality in order to facilitate the creation of his own internal world." Martin C. Stabb 1970, p. 32.

¹⁹¹ in Borges 1974 *Obras completas*. Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, p. 17.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, p. 21.

¹⁹³ So far as an argument for Borges' 'intentionality' goes I plump for a synthesis of Wimsatt and Beardsley's evidences for meaning: (1) the internal but public, which functions as an intentionality derived from the syntactic and semantic mechanics of the art-work; (2) the external but

private, which can be deduced by reference to a wide range of peripheral materials like journals and notes; and (3) the etymological and intermediate, the special history of certain words and expressions that have a bearing on the author's literary production. Without using all three of these at some time or other, the literary detective would have very little to work with, regardless of the painstaking experiments of Barthes on Balzac, or Greimas on de Maupassant. See W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley 1976: 'The Intentional Fallacy, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹⁴ As to the aptitude of this leap of faith I have no choice but to follow the counsel that what look, or sound, like words in sentences (and even poetry is composed of sentences) must, *in the absence of other criteria of interpretation*, be taken as words in sentences. As such their value as truthful utterances depends not only on the content they describe (what the poem is "about"), but the fact that I *can* in fact interpret them as having any meaning at all, that is, that I *approach* them as if they were language in the first place. Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels assume that intention and meaning are synonymous terms within the context of language use, both being convertible to speech acts, and as such, the product of an intending intelligence. Criticising Paul de Man's reading of Rousseau's use of the language-like sound 'Marion' in *The Confessions* in the presence of the servant named Marion (and thus allowing his utterance to be interpreted as a naming gesture falsely incriminating her) as an example of linguistic bad faith, they argue that it is impossible not to treat word-like phenomena as intentional language, since one has already done so in calling it "language", "speech-act", "words", etc. as such. See Steven Knapp, and Walter Benn Michaels, 1985: *Against Theory*, pp. 21-24.

¹⁹⁵ One can see the principle of semantic allusion at work even in those authors who champion the death of the author. While an exhaustive description is beyond the needs of this note, one may remark that when Roland Barthes writes about the disjunction of *lexias* in Poe's 'Valdemar' he does so in accord with the principle that words (and the structures that words make up) *imply* other words, and that the text can only continue if the logical contingencies of words are privileged over any rhetorical function outside the text: 'With M. Valdemar medically dead, the narrative *ought* to finish: the death of the hero (except in cases of religious resurrection) *ends* the story. The *relaunching* of the

anecdote (beginning with lexia 103) *appears* then at once as a narrative necessity (to *allow* the text to continue) and a logical scandal. This scandal is that of the supplement: for there to be a supplement of narrative, there *will have to be* a supplement of life: once again, the narrative *stands for* life.' Roland Barthes: 'Textual analysis: Poe's "Valdemar"' in David Lodge(ed) 1988: *Modern Criticism and Theory*, p. 185. [Originally published 1968] My italics. It is clear that the terms *ought*, *will have to be*, cannot be considered rhetorically within the context of their occurrence, or rather, I must accept Barthes' word for it that his idea is to convey a strong impression of *intentionality* in using them. Whether or not the intention refers to Poe, or to Poe's 'Valdemar' is not important, since intentionality per se is an idea implying at least semantic *necessity*. On the other hand *ends*, *relaunching*, *appears*, *allow*, are more straightforward ideas about semantic obligation, and clearly indicate Barthes' intention to convey ideas, although by rights they should not appear in an explanation of a work by Poe which seeks to question the notion of intentionality itself. But then, in assigning his 'lexias' Barthes does explain that such reading units are arbitrary products [p. 173] (i.e. divisions made at will and with the critic's convenience at heart rather than any scientific principle of classification) so I guess such inconsistency is built into the account.

¹⁹⁶ in Borges 1974. Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, p. 22.

¹⁹⁷ This opinion is not shared by Gene Bell-Villada, but whether or not 'The Approach to Almotasim' 'unmistakably inaugurates virtually all of Borges' key practices and ideas' (Gene Bell-Villada, 1981: *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, p. 67.) is not as important as the careful explication of Borges' intellectual prehistory that I have been attempting. For questions of primacy the reader must make up his or her own mind.

¹⁹⁸ Borges in "An Autobiographical Essay" p. 215.

¹⁹⁹ in Borges 1974 *Obras completas*. Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, p. 23.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 27.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 30.

²⁰² See Borges in "An Autobiographical Essay" p. 216. Jaime Alazraki in *Borges and the Kabbalah* investigates the Gnostic theme of profane creation (for the Gnostics the earth was not created by God, but by a lesser creator called the Demiurge, thus human evil, disease and error could be explained in terms of determinism based on an impure origin)

to trace Borges' use of this theme in stories such as 'The Circular Ruins', Alazraki, 1988, Ch. 2, pp. 19-24. See also Kattia Chinchilla Sanchez 1991: *Entre el Adán y el Golem*, a propósito de un poema de Jorge Luis Borges, pp. 63-71.

²⁰³ As Gene Bell-Villada points out, rather erroneously, Borges 'is not a philosophical or political thinker' (1981, p.33), an impression which Bell-Villada shares with Samuel Beckett, who characterised Borges as one interested in the shape, rather than the content, of ideas (cited in Bell-Villada 1981, p. 32). An intriguing connection, but one for which I have been able to uncover no sound evidence, is that between Meyrink's work and its critique by Hans Sperber (*Motiv und Wort bei Gustav Meyrink*) and Borges' use of 'magic causality' as a theory of thematic autonomy within the text. Did Borges base his theory of thematic resonance on the *Motiv und Wort* school? We may never know. Although the painter Jules Kirschenbaum requotes Borges' denigration of his own abilities as a thinker, he notes that it is impossible to avoid a sense of immanence in reading the fictions: could this sense of expectation be Borges' greatest gift to his audience? See Jules Kirschenbaum 1990: *Dream of a Golem*. In Edna Aizenberg (ed) 1990: *Borges and his Successors: The Borgesian Impact on Literature and the Arts*, p. 244.

²⁰⁴ in Borges 1974 *Obras completas*. Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, p. 40.

²⁰⁵ Borges' taste for exotic imaginary geography is also evidenced in 'Dakar' where mysterious imans pray from mosques surrounded by 'biographical light' (in *Luna de enfrente*, 1974, p. 66.)

²⁰⁶ 'Caminata' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 43.

²⁰⁷ 'Calle desconocida' in *ibid*, p. 20.

²⁰⁸ See Martin Stabb 1970, pp. 34-35. Borges was to wrestle with Berkeley's ambivalent God throughout his writing - how is one to deal with a Being to whom no personal appeals can be made, no supplication offered? 'Según este concepto, Dios no es hacedor de las cosas; es más bien un meditador de la vida o un inmortal y ubicuo espectador del vivir.' Borges in 'La encrucijada de Berkeley' in *Inquisiciones*, p. 122.

²⁰⁹ Of the thirty two poems of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* only ten have no reference to night, evening or dream.

²¹⁰ I owe the use of this term to Vijay Mishra, whose *The Gothic Sublime* reads the Gothic as the product of its times and of its own

particular critical and biographical forces of accumulation (p.142). For Mishra the “intertext” of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is that body of effects that surround its critical reception, as well as the author’s responses to that reception, expressed as a writing strategy that struggles to negotiate a new literary identity for the text. As one can see intertexts are profoundly personal and impermanent expressions of literary integrity, constantly besieged by the tumult of celebrity, a glimpse of the art work before it is swallowed by its public. See also Mishra 1994: *The Gothic Sublime*, pp. 158-162.

²¹¹ In a discussion of Evaristo Carriego’s *La canción del barrio*, Borges would synthesise these two themes, pronouncing their ‘poverty’ as a strength. ‘Chapter 4: La canción del barrio’, 1974, pp. 130-141. Carriego, as the first observer of the barrio, even its ‘inventor’ give it a mortality that it needs to survive. See ‘Chapter 5: Un posible resumen’, 1974, p. 142.

²¹² ‘Amorosa anticipación’ in *Luna de enfrente* [1925] *Obras completas*, Buenos Aires Emecé Editores, 1974, p. 59.

²¹³ Ibid, p. 59. My sincerest apologies for the heterosexist bias of this comment. My brackets. As Linda S. Maier points out, Borges’ relations with women were from the start infused with a Dantesque confusion of desire and romantic sanctification. His physical attraction to Concepción Guerrero, the object of most of the love poems in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, was never consummated. See Linda S. Maier, 1994: ‘Borges’ Early Love Poetry,’ p. 50.

²¹⁴ The [ontological](#)? Fallacy? Morse Peckham makes the point in replying to Wimsatt and Beardsley’s articles on the intentional fallacy that they fail to adequately distinguish between the psychic and semantic levels of meaning involved in using the word ‘fallacy’, and thus impute to it a [psychological](#) aspect when they should be dealing solely with a semantic one. In Peckham’s account of ‘intention’ as the recognition of ‘...how to categorise a certain kind of explanation’ one could argue quite simply (as I do) that for Borges to indulge in an “[ontological fallacy](#)” he must merely have arranged his utterances on women so that I may categorise this explanation in such a way that it does not disconfirm my argument at this stage. See Morse Peckham 1976: ‘The Intentional? Fallacy?’, p. 154.

²¹⁵ Dryden, John 1692: *Discourse of the Original and Progress of Satire*.

²¹⁶ Samuel Johnson 1968 [1781]: Cowley in *Lives of the Poets*. Vol I. London: Oxford University Press, p. 14.

²¹⁷ Of course, I abjure these blatantly sexist comments, fully acknowledging that the absence of women in the life of philosophical discourse in former times was due to the conspiracy of patriarchy to silence women's critical knowledge.

²¹⁸ Bella Brodzski examines Borges' use of the figure of Woman as Muse in his later works, deftly diagnosing the mutually antagonistic tropes of ritualised idealisation and profanation. Like the maddening Aleph, like writing itself, woman is a figure of transcendentalist attraction who outstrips the *formal* constraints of description. See 'Borges and the Idea of Woman', 1993.

²¹⁹ See Linda S. Maier, 1994 'Borges' Early Love Poetry,' p. 49.

²²⁰ Actually this would be Borges' *first* marriage: in 1986, the year of his death, he and his long time amanuensis and collaborator María Kodama, were married.

²²¹ 'El General Quiroga va en coche al muere' in *Luna de enfrente* [1925] *Obras completas*, Buenos Aires Emecé Editores, 1974, p. 61.

²²² 'Último sol en Villa Ortúzar' *ibid*, p. 71.

²²³ 'Versos de catorce' *ibid*, p. 73.

²²⁴ See 'Poema de los dones', 1974, pp. 809-810; *The Unending Gift*, p. 984; 'Otro poema de los dones' in *El Otro, El Mismo*, 1974, pp. 936-937.

²²⁵ 'Mi vida entera' *ibid*, p. 70.

²²⁶ *Loc. cit*, p. 70.

²²⁷ *Loc. cit*, p. 70.

²²⁸ *Loc. cit*, p. 70.

²²⁹ *Loc. cit*, p. 70. Borges was to parody his gift for verbal recirculation in 'Los teólogos' where two theologians literally conduct a war of words that continues in paradise after their deaths. 'Los teólogos', 1974, pp. 550-556.

²³⁰ 'Mi vida entera', p. 70.

²³¹ In Borges' writings Carriego assumes a mythic stature. For example, the opening sentence of an essay 'Carriego y el sentido del arrabal' in the collection *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Proa, 1926) parodies the opening sentence from Cervantes' *Don Quijote*: 'En un calle de Palermo de cuyo nombre sí quiero acordarme...' (In a street of Palermo whose name I want very much to remember...) p. 25. When, for example, the importance that Borges

placed on this topic sentence in a later essay on semantic analysis ('Indagación de la palabra' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 9-28.) is taken into account, this 'parody' becomes celebration and Carriego is linked with Borges' theory of symbolic reproduction throughout literature.

²³² 'Calle con almacén rosado' *ibid*, p. 57. The theme of the poet's poverty of description when faced with the elemental immensity of the sea is continued in 'Singladura' when Borges speaks of 'a plenitude of poverty' before 'the ancient language of the sea that I have not deciphered' in *Luna de enfrente*, 1974, p. 65.

²³³ 'Jactancia de quietud' *ibid*, p. 62.

²³⁴ 'Una despedida' *ibid*, p. 60.

²³⁵ 'Montevideo' *ibid*, p. 63.

²³⁶ Title from Virgil, *The Eclogues*, I, line 3:

nos patriae finis et dulcia linquimus arva
We depart from our own country, from the
sweet
fields. [Tr. Dudley Fitts]

²³⁷ See George Orwell 1962: 'Rudyard Kipling' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 161-176.

²³⁸ All poetry 'narrates' an event, or events, simply by being composed of semantic words. In fact, it is impossible to construct a sentence with the minimum grammatical apparatus (noun + verb) that does not describe, and hence 'narrate' an event.

²³⁹ Hernán Murena condemns such a move on the grounds that Borges, as poet, is aesthetically unsuited to such patriotic and nationalistic sentiments. See H. A. Murena 1948: 'Condensación de una poesía'. *Sur*. Nos. 164-5, p. 77. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel finds a precursor for the ill-fated general's existential certainty in the following lines from the 12th century Arab poet and philosopher, Almoqtádir el Magrebí:

Murieron otros, pero ello aconteció en el pasado,
que es la estación (nadie lo ignora) más propicia a la muerte.
¿Es posible que yo, súbdito de Yaqub Almansur,
muera como tuvieron que morir las rosas y Aristóteles?

(Others have died, but it happened in the past
which is the season, as everyone knows, most propitious for death.
Is it possible that I, the subject of Yaqub Almansur,
should die as roses and Aristotle had to die?)

In María Rosa Lida de Malkiel 1952: *Contribución al estudio de las fuentes de Jorge Luis Borges*. *Sur*. Nos. 213-14, pp. 50-57. See also Enrique Anderson-Imbert 1962: *Nueva contribución al estudio de las fuentes de Jorge Luis Borges*, pp. 7-13.

²⁴⁰ 'El General Quiroga va en coche al muere' *Luna de enfrente*, 1974, p. 61.

²⁴¹ See Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, p. 124. For Borges' thoughts on the origin, development and [aesthetics](#) of the milonga, and its close relative the tango, see 'Apunte férvido sobre las tres vidas de la milonga' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 134-138; 'Ascendencias del tango' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 111-121; 'Chapter 11: Historia del tango', 1974, pp. 159-168; 'El tango' in *El Otro, El Mismo*, 1974, pp. 888-889.

²⁴² 'Prólogo' to *Cuaderno San Martín*, 1974, p. 79.

²⁴³ 'Prólogo' to *Evaristo Carriego*, 1974, p. 101.

²⁴⁴ Borges "An Autobiographical Essay" p. 235.

²⁴⁵ Although Kant does not deny the existence of sensual input his reliance on categorical organisation regarding space and time makes sense data strictly unnecessary. His understanding of space and time as *a priori* pure intuitions (reinen Anschauungen) could, on his account, take place without any organs of reception at all, thus making bodies technically superfluous and drastically reducing the need for a causal mechanism of admission.

²⁴⁶ See Teufelsdröckh's passionate appeal to the antiquity, and thus metaphysical preeminence, of Nature in *Sartor Resartus*, London and Toronto, E. P. Dutton and Co, 1908, p. 78: 'Nature alone is antique, and the oldest art is the mushroom; that idle crag thou sittest on is six-thousand years of age,' to which Carlyle as Editor, adds: 'In which little thought, as in a little fountain, may there not lie the beginning of those well-nigh unutterable meditations on the grandeur and mystery of TIME, and its relation to ETERNITY, which play such a part in this Philosophy of Clothes?' Elsewhere Teufelsdröckh says, 'Or what is Nature? Ha! why do I not name thee GOD? Art not thou the "Living Garment of God"?' p. 142.

²⁴⁷ This kind of sublime adoration seems not to be the type that Vijay Mishra, quoting Peter de Bolla (*The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) theorises for female experience of the sublime in regard to a melding of subject and object in rejection of phallogocentricism. The female subject, Mishra ponders, may herself be a site for contestation of any idea of subject position as such. The sublime may be 'ideological and critical, since it draws its strength from a critique of a sublime male subjectivity' and even (directly quoting de Bolla) 'leak into the subject' which can be seen as a feminist reading that chimes dissonantly with Borges' views on the artist as the often unwilling subject of a God that remains immune to human contact. But anyway, this is not Mishra's aim. See Vijay Mishra 1994: *The Gothic Sublime*, p. 21. Regarding the category of the sublime at all Daniel O'Hara notes in an indirectly related appraisal of Bloom: 'Bloom's topic is the sublime and how one would compose a counter-sublime of one's own to best the precursor at his own game.' In my opinion Vijay Mishra has given the best account of creative sublimorrhoea with twenty counter-sublimes. See Daniel O'Hara 1983: *The Genius of Irony: Nietzsche in Bloom*. In Jonathan Arac; Wlad Godzich; Wallace Martin (eds) 1983: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, p. 120.

²⁴⁸ It may be argued that God and the sublime are not contiguous terms, since the former is most usually used as a personification of nature, the universe, have what you will, rather than as a cryptograph for the very process of attempting to conceive the infinitely great. But is this illimitable term really very different from my own attempts to name the unnameable? As Mishra notes of Wordsworth's longing for the loss of individuality as a means of experiencing a transcendent nature (see Mishra: *The Gothic Sublime*, pp. 34-5) Kant's definition of sublimity in the *Critique of Judgement* as '...the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense' (in Mishra, p. 33) becomes a verbal talisman for a Nature that has become God, and by extension, Man.

²⁴⁹ 'Caminata' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 43.

²⁵⁰ Borges relates his misgivings in an interview with Norman T. Giovanni in *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933-1969*, p. 231.

²⁵¹ Borges, 'Examen de metáforas' in *Inquisiciones*, p. 71.

²⁵² Jaime Alazraki notes a coincidence between Borges' views on universal history as the history of a few [Metaphors](#), and those of Victor Shklovsky on the indestructibility of verbal images: 'The task of poetic schools is no other than the accumulation and revelation of new devices for *disposing* and elaborating the verbal material, and it consists in the *disposition* of the images rather than their creation.' Quoted in Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, p. 171. See also 'Chapter 4: La canción del barrio', 1974, p. 135, where Borges compares the creation of Carriego's tangos to the 'postulation' of a spent or discredited god to explain this flawed world by the Gnostics.

²⁵³ These include, among others, *Nosotros*, *La Prensa*, *El Hogar*, *Valoraciones*, *Inicial*, and *Contretemps* (1936) co-founded with Adolfo Bioy Casares. See Lettres et Amitiés. In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 13-14. For a tribute to Norah Lange, one of Borges' early flames and the co-editor of *Prisma*, a single-sheet poster 'magazine' plastered on walls in the dead of night, and usually illustrated by Norah and Xul Solar, see 'Norah Lange' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 83-85.

²⁵⁴ Although it is usually translated as 'The Size of my Hope' this lends it a naivety that belies its sophistication as an agenda for Borges' investigations into socio-linguistics. As Enrique Anderson-Imbert reports the title may have been suggested to Borges by Alejandro Korn the editor of *Valoraciones*, a periodical Borges had contributed to in the mid-1920s. Writing in a review of Alfredo Colmo which appeared in March 1926 (coincidentally in the same edition that Borges published the essay that was to give its title to the collection) Korn comments that Colmo 'no oculta el tamaño de su esperanza' (does not hide the extent of his hope). In Enrique Anderson-Imbert 1962: *Nueva contribución al estudio de las fuentes de Jorge Luis Borges*, p. 10.

²⁵⁵ Valéry Larbaud notes in a review what he takes to be the birth of a new type of criticism in *Inquisiciones* [1925] one founded on the acknowledgment of English and German literatures, rather than that resting on those of French, Spanish and Latin-American culture. Valéry Larbaud 1925: *Sur Borges*. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 111. Borges, however, remains firmly convinced that language must be pared away to its simplest elements before it can be effectively used as a poetic means of expression. At this stage he is still a latinist at heart, as his remarks

in 'Sir Thomas Browne' indicate. See 'Sir Thomas Browne' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 40-41.

²⁵⁶ 'El idioma infinito' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 37. The Holy Federation is an ironic reference to the Holy Roman Empire under Charles V of Spain, who as Holy Roman Emperor (1519-58) fought a losing battle to keep his Roman Catholic empire together in the face of emergent Protestantism.

²⁵⁷ One must, however, be cautious in ascribing to Borges quasi-magical powers of stylistic creation in an historical sense. Jaime Alazraki's claim that '[I]n order to realize fully the extent of this linguistic revolution, one must be aware of the fact that until Borges Latin America lacked a literary language of its own. Argentine or Mexican prose writers resorted to a Spanish benumbed by centuries of stagnant *casticismo* (the Spanish version of linguistic purism)' (Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, p. 77.) conveniently forgets the contribution of Hernández. Borges was to parody this preciousness with origins in 'Las alarmas del doctor Américo Castro', 1974, pp. 653-657.

²⁵⁸ 'El idioma infinito' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 37.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 39-41.

²⁶⁰ Note that I say Borges' 'intention' *can* be seen, not that it must be seen. As Theodore Redpath points out in his criticism of Wimsatt and Beardsley one must only be able to make a strong case for an assertion about the author's intention in order to have something definite to say on the matter. By resorting to an evaluative parallel between what the words in a poem *do* mean in their historical circumstance, and what meaning the reader is expected to take from them if they are both historically informed and linguistically competent, Redpath approaches a literary version of a correspondence theory of truth in linguistic philosophy, his 'aesthetic decision' emerging as the result of logical operation. See Theodore Redpath 1976: 'The Meaning of a Poem', pp. 14-25, and especially 23-25.

²⁶¹ 'El idioma infinito' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 42.

²⁶² Malcolm K. Reid shows how this "verbal" idealism can also be read as "materialist" in that the words that constitute its originary matter must always be seen as linguistic expressions of the subject's particular circumstances. Of course, Reid's analysis is much more subtle than this commentary suggests. See *Jorge Luis Borges and His Predecessors: or, Notes towards a materialist history of linguistic idealism*, 1993.

²⁶³ 'La adjetivación' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, pp. 50-51. See also Alazraki, 1988, p. 131. Baudrillard captures this nostalgia for sources when he diagnoses the myth of origin as a device that exists to 'conjure time in the ambient system' (i.e. the system of relations that determines a *particular* historical and cultural domain). There is in fact a 'particular status of the bygone object' as Borges would, had he read Baudrillard, have confirmed. But he would also, perhaps uneasily, have recognised himself as the conjurer of this disappearing trick. See Jean Baudrillard 1990a: 'Subjective Discourse or The Non-Functional System of Objects' in Jean Baudrillard 1990: *Revenge of the Crystal*, p. 36. Roman Jakobson notes that in cases of aphasics losing their ability to distinguish between personal pronouns in speech, this loss may not indeed have a parallel with the loss of spatio-temporal markers (p. 20). He concludes that where pronouns have the function of presenting themselves to the subject as distinct epithets (my, his, her, ours, etc) they are forgotten as possessives, but are retained as far as they are construed as parts of a grammatical structure in speech. See Roman Jakobson 1975: *Les règles des dégâts grammaticaux*, in Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 pp. 19.

²⁶⁴ 'La adjetivación' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, pp. 57-58.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 58. English translation slightly modified.

²⁶⁶ 'Ejercicio de análisis' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 107. As Claude Lévi-Strauss notes of myth in the tradition of ancient Greek and indigenous North American cultures, the act of 'forgetting' during myth-telling is often a way of relocating the speaker within the community as one who must be helped to a shared meaning. The same kind of thing seems to be going for St. Augustine, since in claiming to be ignorant of time, he actually allows the reader to complete his meaning, i.e. Time is a mystery of God. Claude Lévi-Strauss 1975: *Mythe et oubli*. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 p. 299. Obviously Borges' clarity of purpose has been lost to its newly contemporary English-speaking audience, even becoming, along with Barthelme, a stylistic admonishment. See Thomas McCormack 1989: *The Fiction Editor, The Novel, and the Novelist*, p. 52.

²⁶⁷ 'Ejercicio de análisis' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 107.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 108. It is important not to confuse Borges' use of a couplet as an example for the purpose of analysis, and any intention on the part of Cervantes in writing it. As for a discussion in the analytic vein of

just what Cervantes may have intended in writing *Don Quijote* the reader is directed to A. J. Close's '*Don Quixote* and the "Intentionalist Fallacy"', pp. 174-193.

²⁶⁹ Julia Kristeva would tend to agree with Borges here, according to my reading. Where she notes that the act of predication (i.e. the act of isolating a predication as an énoncé) carries with it a deictic locative (i.e. it demonstrates in a physical sense where the predicate must be, namely on the right hand side of the subject) she describes a process Borges outlines in his theory of the preposition as a foretaste of the predicate. It is *there*, and in the act of being *there* it carries with it an impulse to determine its predicate as a *somewhere* into which it can penetrate. See Julia Kristeva 1975a: La fonction prédicative et le sujet parlant. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 p. 235-236.

²⁷⁰ Pretty rightly as it turns out. See Ralph Penny, 1991: *A History of the Spanish Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 196.

²⁷¹ See Michael Riffaterre 1978: *Semiotics of Poetry*, pp. 1-5; Diane Griffin Crowder 1982: 'The Semiotic Functions of Ideology in Literary Discourse' in Harry R. Garvin (ed) 1982: *Literature and Ideology*, pp. 157-8.

²⁷² Borges 1974: 'Las *kenningar*', p. 368. Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) Icelandic historian, poet, and political figure, ranks among the foremost historiographers of the Middle Ages, and composer of the *Heimskringla*, a history of the kings of Norway from legendary times until 1177, and the *Younger Edda*, a handbook for poets, concerned with the rationale of poetic diction, especially the elaborate [Metaphors](#) (kennings) then widely used.

²⁷³ 'Magias parciales del Quijote', 1974, p. 667: 'En la realidad, cada novela es un plano ideal; Cervantes se complace en confundir lo objetivo y lo subjetivo, el mundo del lector y el mundo del libro.'

²⁷⁴ 'Ejercicio de análisis' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 114. The reader will note with some surprise that Borges' opinion is directly opposed to that which he would express in 'Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*'. In that fiction a few lines from Cervantes acquire added levels of significance when they are reproduced by an author living in the 20th century. In other words, in the 'Menard' fiction it is the accumulation of historical detail that gives a work its meaning, not the conjunction of its lexical resources alone. If we accept Borges' earlier

views as valid within the evolution of his aesthetic thought, the 'Menard' can only then be read as a *satire* on the academic interpretation of literature, any other interpretation being disallowed in the context of Borges' rigorously nominalistic view of poetic meaning. Of course, this interpretation, if it were accepted today and had not been absolutely overtaken by the postmodernist orthodoxy, would severely detract from Borges' image as a theoretical innovator.

²⁷⁵ Borges 1921, p. 467.

²⁷⁶ Borges had published an essay on the role of criollism in the work of the Uruguyan authors Pedro Leandro Ipuche and Fernán Silva Valdés the year before where he diagnoses criollo characterisations in terms of their over dependence on a frozen vocabulary and on overly developed sense of their own being as romantic figures traversing the unending pampa. See 'La criolledad en Ipuche' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 63-66. In the following essay in the same collection he directs his attention exclusively to Valdés, whom he had earlier demarcated as a more highly developed stage of criollo self-consciousness, drawing parallels with European romantic poetry, notably that of Hugo and Schiller. Still attracted by linguistic classicism (throughout his career Borges had repeatedly repudiated this volume because of its academic pretensions) he gropes towards a understanding of literature as the embodiment of fundamental [Metaphors](#) that will form the mainstay of his theory of [magic causality](#). At this stage, however, he is still more attracted by the realism of [Metaphor](#) than any symbolic effect lifting it beyond its immediate orbit. Discussing Valdés' *El rancho* Borges finds that '...the images are new, their range is unusual, the environment tastes of a palpable reality...[they are] the crystallisation and almost the annihilation of any other predecessor.' See 'Interpretación de Silva Valdés' in *Inquisiciones*, p. 68. (My translation)

²⁷⁷ 'Invectiva contra el arrabalero' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, pp. 136. The previous year Borges published an earlier exposition of his views locating the criollo's theatrical verbosity as the result of his political tutelage by ranch bosses that would, in Manuel de Rosas, reach their bloody apogee. See 'Queja de todo criollo' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 139-146.

²⁷⁸ Borges celebrates what he finds to be a predilection with eternal themes in the Argentine's criollism, as opposed to its Peninsula variant in 'Las coplas acriolladas' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, pp. 75-84.

²⁷⁹ With the help of Borges' later studies I attempt to illuminate this task in Chapter Five of the present work.

²⁸⁰ 'Profesión de fe literaria' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 146. But Cf. 'La felicidad escrita' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 45-53; 'Un soneto de don Francisco de Quevedo' in *ibid*, p. 81; 'Quevedo', 1974, p. 661: 'La grandeza de Quevedo es verbal.'

²⁸¹ 'Chapter 2: Una vida de Evaristo Carriego', 1974, p. 113.

²⁸² 'Profesión de fe literaria' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 147. Cf. Benjamin: 'What does language communicate? It communicates the mental being corresponding to it. It is fundamental that this mental being communicates itself *in* language and not *through* language.' In 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' in Walter Benjamin 1979: *One-Way Street*, p. 108. And also 'Borges here [i.e. in 'Idioma de los argentinos'] sees language as a dangerous invitation to the writer to exploit the resources which it offers him without regard for what himself wishes to say.' In Thomas H. Hart 1990: 'The Literary Criticism of Jorge Luis Borges' in Richard Macksey (ed.) 1974, pp. 286-87.

²⁸³ See Gustave Spiller 1902: *The Mind of Man: a Text-Book of Psychology*. p. 379 'What has been said as to adjectives is true also of other important parts of speech. Their value in the sonnets is often unmistakable, while, at the same time, they tend to give weight and dignity to many of the sentences and thoughts. In these details of Shakespeare's style he cannot be called original, though undoubtedly he recognised their usefulness to a greater extent than most of his contemporaries. In that, and in that alone, lay his pre-eminence. His claim to inventiveness must be dismissed.'

²⁸⁴ Borges 1921, p. 471. Borges' comments on the 'vagabond I' most probably come from William James' dismissal of the ego as a continuous, autonomous entity, and not as the succession of memories that can be momentarily plucked from their passage for the briefest of inspections. Cf. Chapter XII of William James 1910: *Psychology*, pp. 176-7, 200-201.

²⁸⁵ Borges 1921, p. 468.

²⁸⁶ Borges 1928: 'Indagación de la palabra' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 9. But this must have been just a front, as one his colleagues Alicia Jurado comments: 'Il convient de préciser, à ce propos, que Borges est très loin d'être l'homme froid, indifférent et implacablement rationaliste qu'imaginent beaucoup de ses lecteurs,

jugeant d'après le style de ses essais et de la majeure partie de ses contes.' Alicia Jurado 1964: Borges professeur de littérature. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 46.

²⁸⁷ Borges 1928: 'Indagación de la palabra' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 9.

²⁸⁸ See for example the past pages of 'Menoscabo y grandeza de Quevedo' where Borges draws a strong distinction between the styles of Quevedo and Góngora. In *Inquisiciones*, pp. 43-49.

²⁸⁹ For some limits of propositional interpretation see the discussion in Denis Dutton 1989: 'Why Intentionalism Won't Go Away' in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, pp. 192-209, and Stanley Rosen 'The Limits of Interpretation' in *ibid*, pp. 210-241. Where Dutton takes a text-teleological view and Rosen a horizontal view of authorial intention, what I'm calling Borges' weak psychologism grants the legitimacy of both positions - 'intention' is as much a product of the sequence of words used by an author as the syntagmatic links those words can make with the reader's perception of the text. The *psychological process* by which we understand a sentence is that of an 'intentionalism' already contained within the words used.

²⁹⁰ Borges 1928: 'Indagación de la palabra' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 10.

²⁹¹ Is it acceptable to make such assertions about what an author thinks, and does, and thinks he does? Frank Cioffi's criticisms of Wimsatt and Beardsley seem to indicate that we *may*, as long as we keep the difference between what an author means when he or she writes (which we can never really know) and the clever guesses that the critic makes in assigning the most probable links between the work of art as a collection of statements, and any biographical data that tends to confirm or deny these guesses. See Frank Cioffi 1976: 'Intention and Interpretation in Criticism.', p. 57. Emilio Roma sums up this distinction in Wimsatt and Beardsley as based on '...a logical distinction between the questions 'What does the *speaker* mean?' and 'What does the sentence mean?' See Emilio Roma III 1976: 'The Scope of the Intentional Fallacy', p. 74. For Borges, who was groping toward an automatic kind of psychologism, one that relied on the order of words as tags for intentional states, and not on the surrounding explanations of the author, the rapid and intense conjunction of adjectives, puns, etc. known as 'conceptismo' [conceptism] provides an early model for his anti-Freudianism. See 'Menoscabo y grandeza de

Quevedo' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 43-49. In the same volume Borges eulogises the *posmodernista* Uruguyan author Julio Herrera y Reissig (1875-1910) as the link between the overloaded versification of literary Góngorism and the supercharged intensity of the conceptistas. See 'Herrera y Reissig' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 147-153.

²⁹² Borges would, it seems clear, distance himself from Husserl's idea of intention as the relationship between an act of awareness and its object, which is one sense in which Hirsch uses it to explore the relationship between verbal and nonverbal aspects of any statement of intent. He would, however, embrace Husserl's rejection of any psychologistic explanation of statements on the basis of his [Husserl's] idea that it is the horizon of possible expectations that underwrite a statement's applicability in any situation. See E. D. Hirsch Jr. 1976: 'Objective Interpretation.', pp. 33, 35.

²⁹³ 'Ejercicio de análisis' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, pp. 107-114.

²⁹⁴ Obviously this point of view sits well with post-structuralist assumptions about the relative (absolute?) unimportance of intention in the creation of the art-work. At the level of complex narrative, however, this unimportance is typified in terms which correspond to the major informing paradigm that fashions the reader's expectation, that is, in a psychology of intention. According to this general law small-scale and simple narratives obey an accordingly small-scale and simple psychology, but in this case it is a psychology of primitive drives, a catalogue of functional excesses, rather than a developed structure of narrational processes.

²⁹⁵ Borges 1928: 'Indagación de la palabra' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 10.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 11.

²⁹⁷ 'Language is an efficacious arrangement of the world's enigmatic abundance. What we call a noun is nothing more than an abbreviation of adjectives, and more often than not, their fallacious probability.'

'Examen de metáforas' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 71-72. My translation.

²⁹⁸ In an attempt to describe the polysemic relations of the possessive, an approach of quite respectable lineage (see Roman Jakobson [1936] 1971: *Beitrag zur allgemeinen Kasuslehre*; Otto Jespersen [1924] 1968: *The Philosophy of Grammar*; William Empson [1930] 1953: *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. Noted *inter alia* in Fónagy) Ivan Fónagy rhapsodises 'With the aid of latent meanings (semes) with unconscious

elliptic suggestions, words and grammatical structures in natural languages allow us to surpass our own ideas and experience hardly suggested notions.' (My translation.) Ivan Fónagy 1975: La structure sémantique des constructions possessives. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 p. 81.

²⁹⁹ Although why he selects the feminine form and not either the masculine (ille) or the neuter (illud) is anyone's guess. See Ralph Penny 1991, p. 129.

³⁰⁰ Borges 1928: 'Indagación de la palabra' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 12-13. La Mancha is an arid region located in the south east portion of the Iberian peninsula, Pigüé is a small regional centre in the state of Buenos Aires five hundred kilometres south west from the capital. As such it is of little consequence which one is visualised, Borges suggests, when we read *Don Quijote* as both regions are equally accessible as imaginative constructs.

³⁰¹ In the novel this requisite landscape gradually changes places with the "reality" of his surroundings. As Albert Cook notes '...reality grows as Don Quixote expands his illusion for so long that the surrounding society accords it a quasi-reality...' Albert Cook 1960: *The Meaning of Fiction*, p. 7.

³⁰² See Martín de Riquer, p. 35 n. 1, to *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, London: Harrap, 1950.

³⁰³ Borges 1928: 'Indagación de la palabra' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 15. For a counter-critique of the structure as meaning argument, see Richard M. Ohmann 1972: 'Literature as Sentences' in Howard S. Babb (ed) 1972: *Essays in Stylistic Analysis*, pp. 353-361.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 14. But also 'Libros orondos - la Gramática y el Diccionario - simulan rigor en el desorden.' (Grammar and dictionaries pretend to rigour in disorder like prayer-books.) in 'El culteranismo' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 65.

³⁰⁵ This is not to say that Borges has rigidly followed his model. As Alfred J. Mac Adam notes, the case is difficult to prove. See *Modern Latin American Narratives: The Dreams of Reason*. 1977, p. 30. At times he synthesises Croce's mechanistic view of semantic association, at others he rejects it. See Thomas H. Hart 1990: 'The Literary Criticism of Jorge Luis Borges' in Richard Macksey (ed.) 1974, pp. 277-291.

³⁰⁶ Not to mention contestative. As explanations are added to systems of meaning to create new hybrids, so too the form that these

explanations take changes as well. In later discussion we shall see how this hybridity is both a problem as well as a source of recreation for the narrative genre in Borges. See Sheelagh Johnston 1990: *Theorising Genre: A Critical Overview*. M. Phil. Dissertation granted at Perth: Murdoch University, p. 85.

³⁰⁷ For a converse perspective see Richard Boyd 'Metaphor and Theory Change: What is 'Metaphor' a Metaphor For?' pp. 356-408. For Boyd the 'elemental' quality of electricity would supply no new possibility of producing information, since it is not by an extrapolation of Metaphor's constituents that theoretical understanding proceeds. In this I think he is correct; Heisenberg demonstrates that the structure of the atom is not something that can be visualised. Hence Croce's irresolvable paradox of the inapplicability of mental events to word events, embodied in the statement about the semantic basis of concepts (below). Cf. also '*Rem tene verba sequentur*: If the *verba* are lacking, the *res* too must be wanting.' Benedetto Croce 1922: 'Aesthetica in Nuce' in *Aesthetic, as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, p. 226. W. V. Quine makes the same point in the case of light waves in *Afterthoughts on Metaphor*, p. 159.

³⁰⁸ 'A concept only exists by being thought and embodied in words, that is to say defined, and if the definitions vary the concept varies.' Benedetto Croce 1922: 'Definition and Individual Judgement' in *Aesthetic, as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, p. 67.

³⁰⁹ Borges was later to repudiate what he had earlier taken to be Croce's identification of art with its manner of expression. As José Bianco recounts, he felt such an attitude has led to the creation of a great deal of second-rate stuff. José Bianco 1964: *Des souvenirs*. In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 35-36.

³¹⁰ Borges 'Indagación de la palabra,' p. 15.

³¹¹ From Gustav Spiller 1902: *The Mind of Man*, p. 414, in 'La adjetivación' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, pp. 53-4. Spiller believed that what appear to be individual words are assimilated to consciousness in the form of organic complexes that can be reactivated through any situation where one's need directs. This is intentionalism at its linguistic best. Cf. "Where-is" is a common form. Hence on the recurrence of a similar occasion a similar phrase, such as "where-is" is re-integrated." p. 414.

³¹² Borges 'Indagación de la palabra', p. 10.

³¹³ *Ibid* p. 23.

³¹⁴ Borges 'Indagación de la palabra', p. 25. We might remember Croce's elevation of the meanings of word beyond their dictionary-bindings. Where language is identified with poetics, we are liberated from 'intellectualistic or rationalistic definitions of the parts of speech, disjunctions between proper and [Metaphorical](#) speech, and so on.' Benedetto Croce 1922: 'The Philosophy of Language' in *Aesthetic, as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* p. 256. As the evidence shows, Borges was ready to revise philosophical viewpoints as he came to them, using a salient point to advance an argument without being tied down to a restrictive integration.

³¹⁵ Actually to a Spanish speaker *enun* sounds like a contraction of *enano*, or "dwarf", while *lugardela* could be confused with *lucha de* 'la for "fights for her" and *mancharde* might mean "in order to stain" [manchar + de] giving the possible sense *The dwarf fights for her to stain her*, which puts an entirely different complexion on things. Borges provides another example of possible enfrasis in relating that the foreman in 'The End of the Duel' was based on a real foreman of Carlos Reyles called "Laderecha" (La derecha = the right [hand]) in di Giovanni, Norman Thomas & Halpern, Daniel, MacShane, Frank (eds.) 1973: *Borges on Writing*. New York: E. P. Dutton, p. 25. For another example of the value of punning in [Metaphoric](#) transcription, see Borges, Jorge Luis 1964a: Deux notes bibliographiques. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 98.

³¹⁶ Borges 'Indagación de la palabra', p. 25.

³¹⁷ Borges 'El arte de narrativo y la magia', p. 229.

³¹⁸ This is literally a case of symbols moonlighting. See Nelson Goodman 1979: [Metaphor](#) as Moonlighting, pp. 175-180.

³¹⁹ See Northrop Frye 1976: *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society*, 247. On the matter of defining what is meant by inferring something, I have not been able to surpass Morse Peckham's elegant description of the inference of intention as '...a way of accounting for or explaining the generation of an utterance'. While not a report, my own comments on Borges' process of inferring do suggest a way of accounting for what I have called a "mistake" in terms that are consistent with his later comments. See Morse Peckham 1976: 'The Intentional? Fallacy?', p. 155.

³²⁰ Borges 'Indagación de la palabra' p. 27.

³²¹ Willis Barnstone (ed.) 1982: *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, p. 13.

³²² We will encounter Borges' investigation of the image of *whiteness* in Morris' *The Life and Death of Jason* and Melville's *Moby Dick* in the following chapter.

³²³ See *Borges at Eighty*, p. 164.

³²⁴ 'Las *kenningar*' p. 369. My parentheses.

³²⁵ 'Indagación de la palabra' p. 27.

³²⁶ I'm aware that this seems a backward step in modern Australian functional linguistics, where grammatical classifications are only seen as useful in their greater contextualisation of speakers' construction of meaning, but it's useful for Borges who employs grammatical classifications as quasi-functional operators. Thus, grammar becomes semantically modal - it allows subjects to construct utterances on the basis of grammatical *potential*, as well as formal codification. Modality becomes therefore an act, as well an effect, of grammatical potential. For a discussion (using a combination of textual analysis and possible worlds theory) of the cross contamination of modality in fictional argument in Borges see Marie-Laure Ryan 1991: *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, especially pp. 193-200.

³²⁷ Except, that is, in the rare case of onomatopoeia.

³²⁸ The AFL (Australian Football League) is the publicity and marketing division for Australia's civil religion, Aussie Rules Football, a nationally televised tribal spectacle.

³²⁹ See 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' in *Ficciones*, pp. 431-443.

³³⁰ 'Indagación de la palabra', p. 28.

³³¹ *Ibid* 20.

³³² 'Las *kenningar*' p. 375.

³³² El arte narrativo y la magia, in *Discusión*, Buenos Aires, Emecé Editores 1974, p. 229.

³³⁴ As Jeremy Hawthorn notes in a discussion of the crisis of reference between text and world: 'The effect of this [radical juxtaposition of definitions] on the reader may be the same as that felt by Foucault, when he read a similarly comic and disorienting list in Borges.' That list occurs in the Introduction to *The Order of things*, and acts as a tutelary image for the western epistemic tradition. See Jeremy Hawthorn (ed.) 1984: *Criticism and Critical Theory*, p. 137. My parentheses. But is the subject vanished, or does Foucault's "anxiety" reflect a too-strident protest that is meant to make us look again? See Richard Poirier, 1987a: *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections*, pp. 185-

188. Even when Foucault remarks that ‘the radical effacement of this gradation [i.e. from first order to second order discourse] can only ever be play, utopia, or anguish’ one is aware that the anguish must itself be effaced in recognising the second order’s return as ‘lyrical’ or as the bearer of a ‘freshness’ that the reader has forgotten. See Michel Foucault 1971: *The Order of Discourse*. In Robert Young (ed) 1981: *Untying the Text*, p. 57.

³³⁵ Roland Barthes 1977: *Image Music Text* Translated by Stephen Heath: London: Fontana. Flamingo, p. 51.

³³⁶ ‘Eduardo Wilde’ in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 155-162. See also ‘Acotaciones’ in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 95.

³³⁷ See Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, p. 92.

³³⁸ ‘Eduardo Wilde’ in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 158.

³³⁹ Note that a “noun-group” differs from a syntagm in that groups of nouns don’t necessarily entail any *in absentia* association. Their relationship may be strictly reciprocal. ‘John’s hat’ merely states a possessive relationship John has to his hat, and the fact of this particular hat being the possession of John.

³⁴⁰ ‘Eduardo Wilde’, pp. 158-159.

³⁴¹ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, p. 36. Jean Baudrillard also acknowledges this syntagmatic gulf between English and another neo-latin language (French) when, in proposing that language might well be conceived as a series of ‘transferential functions’ and that ‘the whole of sociality could well be described in terms of a Deleuzian unconscious or monetary mechanism (or even in terms of Riesman’s “other directedness”, which already refers to this floating of identities - but alas, in terms that are all too Anglo-Saxon and hardly schizophrenic).’ Jean Baudrillard 1990c: ‘The End of Production’ in Jean Baudrillard 1990: *Revenge of the Crystal*, p. 115. Alfonso de Toro proposes a rhizomorphic reading of Borges’ intersubjectivisation in El productor ‘rizomórfico’ y el lector como ‘detective literario,’ based on an implicit acceptance of symbolically concrete values (p. 157). In Blüher, Karl Alfred and Toro, Alfonso de (eds.) 1995, pp. 113-168.

³⁴² Tzvetan Todorov 1975: *The Fantastic: A Structuralist Approach to a Literary Genre*. Translated by Richard Howard. Foreword by Robert Scholes. New York: Cornell University Press.

³⁴³ Gene Bell-Villada, 1981: *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, p. 80. As Jean Ricardou comments: ‘...sitôt abandonné l’a priori de la solution privilégiée, le transit d’une solution à telle

autre... s'affirme non plus comme dévoiement frappé d'hésitations, mais, libéré, comme un moyen de recherches, d'inédites mises en contact, de création.' Jean Ricardou 1964: The god of the labyrinth. In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 125-126. Slightly modified.

³⁴⁴ Cited by Bell-Villada as in Tzvetan Todorov 1967: *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Paris:Seuil, p. 116. Actually Todorov's comments on imaginary [causality](#) at this point cannot be held to describe anything but a vague causal principle, a *pan-determinism*, based on the appearance of 'compatibilities and incompatibilities' that even the author admits are founded on 'an intuition which it is difficult to make explicit for the time being' (pp. 105, 106, 1970). However, his analysis of the sub-divisions within the fantastic, and the intersections and over-laps between the *uncanny*, *the fantastic*, and *the marvellous* (p. 44 *passim*) do further our understanding of [magic causality](#) in Borges' mature writing, particularly the *ficción*. Todorov's discussion of a causal principle in fantastic literature, and its application to Borges ideas and writing, will be examined later in this Chapter.

³⁴⁵ See Pierre Macherey 1978: 'Borges and the Fictive Narrative' in *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 252.

³⁴⁶ Edgar Allan Poe 1938: 'Magazine Writing - Peter Snook' in *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, pp. 564-573.

³⁴⁷ Berel Lang characterises this confusion as emerging from Croce's views on generic nominalism ('A possible implication of this alternative...is the contention that with it, the several genres of philosophical writing and beyond that even the individual works *within* a genre cannot be compared or criticized.') [emphasis supplied], a view that I have taken as fundamental for my own attack on Borges' 'readability'. See Berel Lang 1990: *The Anatomy of Philosophical Style*, p. 18.

³⁴⁸ 'El idioma de los argentinos', p. 164.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 164.

³⁵⁰ See Paul Zumthor 1975: *Langue, texte, énigme*, p. 199. In 'Pierre Ménard' Borges extrapolates his remark on [Metaphor](#) onto an entire literary production. We learn that even though a small section of the *Quijote* has been reproduced, word for word, it is nonetheless 'incomparably richer' than its original - no doubt through the accretion of meanings that have arrived via the historical process. See Peter W. Nesselroth 1985: *Literary Identity and Contextual Difference*, p. 43.

³⁵¹ 'La Aventura y el Orden...A la larga, toda aventura individual enriquece el orden de todos y el tiempo legaliza innovaciones y les otorga virtud justificativa.' Borges in 'La aventura y el orden' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 71.

³⁵² Translation adapted from 'El idioma de los argentinos', p. 164.

³⁵³ 'A los criollos les quiero hablar...Mi argumento de hoy es la patria: lo que hay en ella de presente, de pasado y de venidero.' (I wish to speak to the criollos...My argument today is one of the Fatherland, that Fatherland inhabiting it now, in the past, and in the future.' Borges in *El tamaño de mi esperanza* in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, pp. 5. However, Malcolm K. Read would, on equally plausible grounds and from Borges' own comments, strongly disagree with me here, charging me with a self-fulfilling structuralist thesis. The plain fact is that it's impossible to derive any unitary thesis out of the Borgesian corpus, as Read himself acknowledges in Borges' revisionism of Platonism in his conversations with Richard Burgin. One must do one's best, and to hell with the competition. See *Jorge Luis Borges and His Predecessors: or, Notes towards a materialist history of linguistic idealism*, 1993, p. 38.

³⁵⁴ Willis Barnstone (ed.) 1982: *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, pp. 92-93.

³⁵⁵ See 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins', pp. 706-709. John Wilkins (1614-1672), apart from being Bishop of Chester and chaplain to Bishop Berkeley's great grandfather, was also Oliver Cromwell's brother-in-law. In an extremely varied intellectual life he wrote on the possible government of the moon, and how we might travel there by the art of flying, speculated that the earth is one of the planets (till then a radical notion) and even wrote a treatise on mental communication over distance - what we might call telepathy today. His work on an idealist human character and a universal philosophical language thus falls naturally enough in integrity and ambition into the body of his speculations. As Horace Walpole remarks in a letter to H. S. Conway of October 15, 1784: 'I discovered an alliance between Bishop Wilkin's art of flying, and his plan of universal language; the latter of which he no doubt calculated to prevent the want of an interpreter when he should arrive at the moon.' Extract quoted in S. Austin Allibone (ed) 1871: *Allibone's Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors*. Volume III. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co.

³⁵⁶ See 'Kafka y sus precursores', 1974, pp. 710-712. He may even spawn slick imitators as far away as Australia who, attempting to flee

the crushing banality of their native land, exult in the license he seems to grant them in rewriting the past and claiming that they have really been cosmopolitan (the anguished cry of the embittered parochial) all the time. See Robert Ross 1990: "It Cannot *Not* Be There": Borges and Australia's Peter Carey. In Edna Aizenberg (ed) 1990: *Borges and his Successors: The Borgesian Impact on Literature and the Arts*, pp. 48-49.

³⁵⁷ Speaking of poetic production Harold Bloom notes the mystery of authorial ascription when he concludes that 'the initial trope or image in any new poem is closely related to the *hidden presence* of the new poem in its precursor poem.' Harold Bloom 1975: *Kabbalah and Criticism*, p. 64.

³⁵⁸ This system is not unique: in 1850 Letellier constructed an analogue through which by concatenations of vowels and consonants, each representing a zoological phylum, any species could be conveniently described; in that of 1845 by Bonifacio Sotos Ochando the universe could be mapped by a series of regular terminals to the root verb. The complexity of such a world-naming system should not therefore be entirely dismissed as a Borgesian incitement to the indecipherability of the universe, as Jaime Alazraki does in Chapter 11 'Oxymoronic structure in Borges' essays' of his *Borges and the Kabbalah*, 1988, p. 141; or as Debra A. Castillo assumes (See *The Translated World: A Postmodern Tour of Libraries in Literature*, p. 94.) As I show, regardless of any rhetorical strategy accreted by subsequent criticism, Borges' early essays provide a coherent programme for language and poetics. In 1640 the French grammarian Nicolas Le Gras proposed to Cardinal Richelieu that a school be set up to teach the liberal arts in French rather than Latin. His main argument for rejecting Latin was one that Wilkins would have approved: 'Behold, even though the languages of diverse folk are in themselves diverse, they carry within themselves mental concepts that are in no way dissimilar.' (My translation.) Quoted by Marcel Bataillon 1975: *Quelques idées linguistiques du XVIIe siècle*. Nicolas Le Gras. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 p. 28.

³⁵⁹ Of course, 'Funes Memorius' presents the logically converse case: Funes, the extreme nominalist, becomes subsumed by the individualising possibilities of denotation. For a discussion of the way in which redundancy (i.e. repeated characters, words, etc. in texts, and by extension libraries) can act to interfere with the transmission of

information, see William R. Paulson 1988: *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information*, p. 77 n.27. Paulson makes the point that because the texts in Borges' library cannot in themselves provide a code for deciphering the overall system, its informational value to the librarians is virtually nil. Borges' 'Library' is thus the utmost limit of the postponement principle. See also Thomas M. Leitch 1986: *What Stories Are: Narrative Theory and Interpretation*, p. 126.

³⁶⁰ Gerald L. Bruns characterises this constraint as the product of a print culture (whose resources are finite and not open to change) as opposed to a manuscript culture (which is supposed to allow continual reworkings, and is therefore never "finished"). Borges' Librarian is obliged to wander the infinite hexagonal galleries of the Library in search of the magical sentence that has been written, and is therefore not open to even the possibility of his own authorial contribution. See Gerald L. Bruns 1982: *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History*, p. 45.

³⁶¹ Borges 1974: 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins', p. 707. For Borges' conviction of the indissolubility of our perception of time and space, and by implication its grounding in the symbols of human language, see 'La penúltima versión de la realidad' in *Discusión*, 1974, pp. 198-201. The German philosopher Fritz Mauthner, as Silvia G. Dapía shows in an invaluable contribution to scholarship on Borges' theoretical influences, plays a crucial part in Borges' understanding of the power of language to create a universal [symbolic repertoire](#). See 'La presencia de Fritz Mauthner en el ensayismo de Borges,' 1995, pp. 189-206.

³⁶² See 'El ruiseñor de Keats', 1974, pp. 718: 'Observa Coleridge que todos los hombres nacen aristotélicos o platónicos. Los últimos sienten que las clases, los órdenes y los géneros son realidades; los primeros, que son generalizaciones; para éstos, el language no es otra cosa que un aproximativo juego de símbolos...'

³⁶³ Borges often presents a confounded view of this first dreaming wakefulness. See 'El muerto', 1974, pp. 545-549; 'Las ruinas circulares' in *Ficciones*, 1974, pp. 451-455; 'Formas de una leyenda', 1974, pp. 740-743. The theme of confounded wakefulness is to be demarcated from the circularity of one's not being able to decide whether or not one is dreaming or awake, or even the dream of another, the most commonly noted theme of 'The Circular Ruins'. See

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty 1984: *Dreams, Illusion and Other Realities*, p. 245.

³⁶⁴ 'El idioma de los argentinos', p. 176.

³⁶⁵ Beatriz Sarlo 1993: *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge*, p. 69.

Here I try to integrate Sarlo's insights with Borges' comments on language, developing Borges' textual presence as a function of selected linguistic exclusivities.

³⁶⁶ Borges, 'El idioma infinito' *Proa*, 1921, No. 12, quoted in Beatriz Sarlo 1993, p. 135. Also, with modifications, in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, pp. 37-42. The later version reads: Derecha (y latina) mente dice un hombre la voz que rima con prostituta. El diccionario se le viene encima enseguida y le tapa la boca con *meretriz, buscona, mujer mala, peripatética, cortesana, ramera, perendeca, horizontal, loca, instantánea*, y hasta con *tronga, marca, hurgamandera, iza y tributo*. El compadrito de la esquina podrá añadir *yiro, yiradora, rea, turra, mina, milonga*.... Eso no es riqueza, es farolería, ya que ese cambalache de palabras no nos ayuda ni a sentir ni a pensar (p. 38).

³⁶⁷ 'La riqueza del español es el otro nombre eufemístico de su muerte.' Borges in 'El idioma de los argentinos', p. 171.

³⁶⁸ Borges 1974: 'Las *kenningar*', p. 368.

³⁶⁹ The 'controversy' turned on the antagonisms between urban proletariat writing, named after the working-class Boedo district of Buenos Aires, and bourgeois cosmopolitanism, represented in the contributions of the Floridistas, who took their name from the café culture of the Calle Florida. For Borges' recollections of the *Surrealistas*' leading poet Ramón Gómez de la Serna, see 'An Autobiographical Essay, 1971, p. 223. For an account of poetic (and political) rivalries in Madrid see Anthony Kerrigan 1964: Borges à Madrid. In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 118-124.

³⁷⁰ Borges 1974: 'El otro Whitman' in *Discusión*, p. 206.

³⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 207.

³⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 206-7.

³⁷³ The translation is Borges' own from 'An Autobiographical Essay' p. 220. The poem originally appeared in *Grecia*, Sevilla, December 31, 1919. See also Gloria Videla 1961: Poemas y prosas olvidadas de Borges. *Revista de Literatura Argentina e Iberoamericana*. No. 3, p. 103. For more of Borges' ultraist experiments (including 'Tramways' and 'Russia' see Guillermo de Torre 1964: Pour la préhistoire ultraïste

de Borges. In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 159-167. 'Russia' can be considered Borges' only foray into political didacticism for the Left.

³⁷⁴ Borges 1974: 'Nota sobre Walt Whitman' in *Discusión*, p. 249.

³⁷⁵ In 'Invocación a Joyce' Borges refers to the Irishman's 'arduous labyrinths, infinitesimal and infinite', p. 1004. Ihab Hassan quotes Claude Mauriac's anathema: "After the silence of Rimbaud, the blank page of Mallarmé, (one is tempted to add that of Sterne. Ed.) the inarticulate cry of Artaud, a literature finally dissolves in alliteration with Joyce. The author of *Finnegans Wakes* in fact creates out of whole cloth words full of so many diverse overtones that they are eclipsed by them." (My parenthesised comment) See Ihab Hassan 1973: *Beyond a Theory of Literature: Intimations of Apocalypse?* In Gregory T. Polletta (ed) 1973 p. 150. Borges was apparently the first to bring Joyce's first masterpiece *Ulyses* to an Hispanic audience, reviewing it for *Hogar* in 1924. See 'El *Ulises*' de Joyce' in *Inquisiciones*, p. 23.

³⁷⁶ What is a 'pragmatics'? Richard Rorty notes that the price of meaningful linguistic interpretation may be a specious adherence to teleology: "Linguisticity" is, on this view, cheap. You can impute it to anything simply by working out a translation scheme, just as you can impute goodness to anything by imagining a desirable end to which it can be a means.' Richard Rorty, 1985: *Philosophy Without Principles*, p. 133. So far as Rorty's view holds true Borges would tend to eschew this kind of pragmatics: life is not like art, even though it can look like art at times.

³⁷⁷ Borges, 'Invocación a Joyce', p. 249.

³⁷⁸ See 'La simulación de la imagen' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 85-86. Cf. Northrop Frye 1957: *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, 73.

³⁷⁹ As Borges notes in 'Valéry como símbolo', 1974, p. 686: 'Whitman redactó sus rapsodias en función de un yo imaginario, formado parcialmente de él mismo, parcialmente de cada uno de sus lectores.' Such a shared-I of discourse is, of course, the prerequisite of all language use. See Poetry and Abstract Thought. In Paul Valéry 1958: *The Art of Poetry*, pp. 52-81.

³⁸⁰ 'Nota sobre Walt Whitman' p. 251. See also T. S. Eliot 1962: 'Religion and Literature' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 43-56.

³⁸¹ This participation is revealed in Borges' comments in 'El sueño de Coleridge', 1974, pp. 642-645, and 'El sueño' in *El Otro, El Mismo*, 1974, p. 940, to the effect that one writer might recreate another in an

eternal game. Sometimes Borges himself is the beneficiary of this gift, as in 'El sueño de Pedro Henríquez Ureña', 1974, p. 1129.

³⁸² And even to the speech-act pragmatists, since the question of authorial presence is largely dictated by the concomitant presence or absence of the speech-act in a textual structure. As Teun A. Van Dijk remarks 'Although the domain of pragmatics has traditionally and vaguely been characterised as the 'relations between signs and sign users', we prefer to establish a clear meta-theoretical and methodological distinction between linguistic (grammatical) or logical pragmatics and the socio-[psychological](#) study of verbal interaction.' See Teun A. Van Dijk 1976: 'Pragmatics and Poetics' in *Pragmatics of Language and Literature*, p. 26. Hansjakob Seiler notes that the principle, if not the fact, of concomitance (i.e. that groups of words can form syntagms which it is difficult, if not impossible, to analyse without changing their character as syntagms, or as a group) may be analysed on the basis of the instrumentalism that the parts of a syntagm rely. Dividing concomitance-relations into three forms (Instrumental, Comitative, and Collective) he moves toward a pragmatics that is close to my discussion of '[functionalism](#)' in Ch. 1. See Hansjakob Seiler 1975: Le principe de concomitance. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 pp. 166-207. For an explanation of how Borges uses the enunciative act in poetry to co-opt the reader's own subjectivity, see Graciela Latella, El discurso borgesiano: enunciación y figuratividad en *El Otro y Veinticinco de agosto*, 1983. In Blüher, Karl Alfred and Toro, Alfonso de (eds.) 1995, pp. 83-93.

³⁸³ See Edna Aizenberg 1990a: Borges and the Hebraism of Contemporary Literary Theory, p. 251.

³⁸⁴ See Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, p. 39 *passim*.

³⁸⁵ 'El Espíritu Santo es un escritor elocuente, un vehemente y un copioso escritor, pero no palabrero; tan alejado de un estilo indigente como de un superfluo.' Borges quoting Donne in 'Una vindicación de la Cábala' in *Discusión*, p. 209.

³⁸⁶ Is the Holy Spirit actually capable of self-interpretation? Not according to Borges, nor to Daniel O'Hara, since interpretation would inevitably involve an act of 'revisionary' interpretation, and thus frustrate the Godhead's rather restricted colloquium. Daniel O'Hara, 1985: Revisionary Madness: The Prospects of American Literary Theory at the Present Time, pp. 36-37.

³⁸⁷ See 'Interpreting the Big Book' in Frank Kermode 1991: *The Uses of Error*, pp. 17-28.

³⁸⁸ Borges' naive pragmatism at this stage in his development would be unrecognisable to those critics who are used to assigning his method to the play of absences. Thus, Pierre Macherey's comment that it is only by a recognition of the incomplete or missing book that Borges' real books can be granted their labyrinthine completeness that the Borges of 'The Garden of Forking Paths' can be recognised (Pierre Macherey 1978: 'Borges and the Fictive Narrative' in *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 257). Such a view presupposes a Borges who has been working over the years to establish such a position, but as my discussion indicates, this is not apparent from his earlier work to establish a language theory that could be used as the basis of a poetics.

³⁸⁹ 'El otro Whitman' p. 208.

³⁹⁰ 'El concepto de *texto definitivo* no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio.' 'Las versiones homéricas' in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 239.

³⁹¹ One is, of course, caught in the toils of a conundrum centred in the margin between public and private authorship and readership here. There is no means as far as I can see of breaking the impasse, since defending either side merely pushes the debate to a higher, and more rarefied, level of argument, and generates its own meta-critique. At some point one must simply opt for a reasonable guess as to the author's intention, and show that it is not inconsistent with those passages which have been cited to support the case. When E. D. Hirsch Jr. remarks, defending Plato's criticism of authorial intent, he too is obliged to fall back on a good guess based on his belief about Plato's intentions in mounting the critique: 'When Plato observed that poets could not *explain* what they meant, he intimated that poets were ineffectual, weak-minded, and vague - particularly with respect to their "most elaborate passages". *But even he would not have contended that a vague, uncertain, cloudy, and pretentious meaning is not a meaning, or that it is not the poet's meaning.*' (My emphasis) See E. D. Hirsch Jr. 1976a: 'In Defense of the Author', p. 102. Also see F. E. Sparshott 'Criticism and Performance' p. 114 in the same volume.

³⁹² 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins', p. 708.

³⁹³ Tzvetan Todorov 1975: *The Fantastic: A Structuralist Approach to a Literary Genre*, p. 4. Laura Silvestri investigates Borges' use of personal details in key later texts (*El otro* y *El libro de arena*) to

construct an alternative textual writing persona. Although she comes to the conclusion that he does so through a deep sense of personal shame and self-loathing, the self-deprecating humility of an author who wishes to avoid that hubris attaching to the creator of an immortal book also suggests itself. See Borges y la pragmática de lo fantástico. In Blüher, Karl Alfred and Toro, Alfonso de (eds.) 1995, pp. 45-60.

³⁹⁴ Here I have a 'functional' definition not relying on any 'structural' assumptions, since literature as the *function* of using the name 'literature' does not suppose any pre-existent 'literature' to give it its name. See Tzvetan Todorov 1975a: La notion de littérature. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 pp. 353-354.

³⁹⁵ See Gustav Bergman 1968: *Meaning and Existence*, pp. 18-19.

³⁹⁶ Tzvetan Todorov 1975: *The Fantastic: A Structuralist Approach to a Literary Genre*, p. 6.

³⁹⁷ Benedetto Croce 1922: *Aesthetic, as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* p. 144. Parentheses added.

³⁹⁸ 'Era sintética en el sentido de que seleccionaba los rasgos más relevantes, característicos, del autor y los interpretaba de tal manera que la "característica". Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot 1992: *Crítica literaria y filosofía en Jorge Luis Borges*, p. 281.

³⁹⁹ Tzvetan Todorov 1975, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁰ And just as keenly anticipated, according to some authors, although I think they misunderstand that merely sketching an idea in a few second-rate essays (even Borges calls them that) is not pursuing its implications, hunting down every trail that the quarry throws up on the way to meaning. In a discussion of Borges' experiments in rewriting rewriting ad infinitum Ana María Barrenechea comments that: 'Borges's narrative practice can be described as a gesture that continually establishes distinctions, undoes them, and then reverts to them anew with greater, more disturbing complexity. Long before Derrida, his deconstructions were the masterful result of an endless process of dispersal, a dispersal resolved into a dazzling unity through following new, untrodden paths: it is a gesture of erasure that retains in filigree not only the marks of what has been effaced but also deeper and more hurtful wounds.' See Ana María Barrenechea 1990: On the Diverse (South American) Intonation of Some (Universal) [Metaphors](#). In Edna Aizenberg (ed) 1990: *Borges and his Successors: The Borgesian Impact on Literature and the Arts*, p. 25.

Endnotes to Chapter Four

⁴⁰¹ This is not to say that Borges' theory obeys the law of the crescendo, which would imply an unnecessary psychologism. See Kenneth Burke 1962: 'The Poetic Process' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 75-90. As will be obvious, the theory is a direct product of Borges' Ultraist manifesto, maintaining the importance of the everyday world of experience and criticising the sterility of self-consciously high art.

⁴⁰² Although he fails to mention it, Borges clearly inherits this prejudice against [psychological](#) description from Henry James' 1884 essay 'The Art of Fiction' which proposes a strictly causal regimen for narrative description.

⁴⁰³ W. H. Gass 1969: 'Imaginary Borges' in *The New York Review of Books*, 20 November, p. 5. For candid, and not always complimentary, comments on Borges' choice of lecture material for his course in English literature at the University of Buenos Aires see Various correspondents 1964: Entrevue avec les élèves de Borges. In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 48-52. See also Ronald Christ 1969: *The Narrow Act: Borges' Art of Illusion*, 43; Gene Bell-Villada, 1981: *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, p. 24.

⁴⁰⁴ Gene Bell-Villada, 1981: *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, p. 23.

⁴⁰⁵ Clearly a victory of taste over genius. See Irving Babbitt 1962: 'Genius and Taste' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, p. 40-41.

⁴⁰⁶ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*. 1982, p. 163. As for the ploy of reducing everything in the novel to its [psychological](#) symbology, see Philip Rahv 1970: *Literature and the Sixth Sense*, p. 166.

⁴⁰⁷ Id est ad plures opinor et sic hoc deploro.

⁴⁰⁸ 'This is how Borges is usually interpreted: he is made to conclude [a fiction] by having attributed to him the appearances of an intelligent scepticism.' Pierre Macherey 1978: 'Borges and the Fictive Narrative' in *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 252.

⁴⁰⁹ The best of these attempts is that of Gene Bell-Villada in *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, 1981. Bell-Villada acknowledges Borges' hostility to psychologism and wish to privilege causal relations as the basis of narrative (1981, pp. 25, 41, 46) but includes such a wealth of [psychological](#) explanations for character

motivation that they utterly subsume his text, i.e. Bell-Villada's remorselessly Freudian reading of 'The Sect of the Phoenix' and 'Emma Zunz' (1981, pp. 103-107; 183-188).

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, p. 230.

⁴¹¹ Borges 1928: 'Hombres pelearon' second section of 'Dos esquinas' (Two Corners) in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 151-154.

⁴¹² Ibid, p. 154.

⁴¹³ Borges 1935: El asesino desinteresado Bill Harrigan, in *Historia de la infamia*, p. 319.

⁴¹⁴ For Emma Zunz the moment of celebration is precipitated by the rape she invites upon her own sacrificial body. 'Emma Zunz', 1974, pp. 564-568. For other holocausts of the body that preserve the soul, see 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' in *Ficciones*, 1974, pp. 472-480; 'La forma de la espada' in *Artificios* [1944] appended to *Ficciones*, pp. 491-495; 'Tres versiones de Judas' in *Artificios*, pp. 514-518; 'El "Biathanatos"', 1974, pp. 700-702; 'Tema del traidor y del héroe' in *ibid*, pp. 496-498; 'El hombre en el umbral', 1974, pp. 612-616.

⁴¹⁵ As Eric Rabkin notes this parallelism enables an anti-contextual comparison to be made between the reader's expectation for the text at the formal level, and its actual outcome at the narrative one. Borges employs this side-effect to prognose Bill Harrigan's demise - we are subliminally led through a cosmic balance-sheet to a divine, and final, accounting. See Eric S. Rabkin 1973: *Narrative Suspense: "When Slim turned sideways..."* p. 20.

⁴¹⁶ 'Sur l'évolution littéraire' in Stéphane Mallarmé 1945, p. 870.

⁴¹⁷ See Paul Ricoeur's discussion of these 'first-order' characters in a theory of singular causal imputation in Paul Ricoeur 1984: *Time and Narrative*, pp. 181, 182-192.

⁴¹⁸ Borges, *El arte narrativo y la magia*, p. 226.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, p. 226.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, p. 227.

⁴²¹ Loc. cit, p. 227.

⁴²² Loc. cit, p. 227.

⁴²³ Ibid, p. 229. The song itself runs to some twelve pages of lyric duelling.

⁴²⁴ William Morris 1907: *The Life and Death of Jason: A Poem* pp. 215, 216, 224, 225. [Originally published 1867].

⁴²⁵ See also *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, p. 144.

⁴²⁶ 'El arte narrativo y la magia' p. 232.

⁴²⁷ Ibid, p. 230.

⁴²⁸ See Alazraki, 1988, pp. 129-30.

⁴²⁹ 'El arte narrativo y la magia', p. 230. Joan Crawford established her movie career as a glamour queen in the early 1930s in such monuments to tinsel as *Letty Lynton* and *Grand Hotel*.

⁴³⁰ See Robert Heilman 1962: 'The Turn of the Screw as Poem' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 283-302.

⁴³¹ One could add Plato's fable of the cave, although with the proviso that we remember that the Greek's aim is to disabuse us of the reality of imagery. For a discussion of the way in which Borges 'modernises the fantastic' (p. 445), see Juan José Barrientos 1989: Borges y Lovecraft. *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas*, Barcelona, 21-26 de agosto. Antonio Vilanova (ed.), Tomo III, pp. 443-447.

⁴³² 'El arte narrativo y la magia', p. 230.

⁴³³ English author, diplomat and naval officer (1603-1665) an early theorist of extreme homoeopathic and sympathetic remedies for wounds, as this example would seem to demonstrate.

⁴³⁴ See James Frazer 1911: *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. Vol. I, Ch. III, §§ 2, 3.

⁴³⁵ As Borges remarks to Rita Guibert: 'I've never written a novel because I think that as a novel has a consecutive existence for the reader it may also have a purely consecutive existence for the writer. On the other hand, a story is something that you take in at a single reading. As Poe used to say: "There is no such thing as a long poem." In Rita Guibert 1973: Interview with Borges. In *Seven Voices*, pp. 79. See also Graham Hough 1978: 'Edgar Allan Poe' in *Selected Essays*, p. 139.

⁴³⁶ 'El arte narrativo y la magia', p. 231.

⁴³⁷ Or [ontological](#) purpose. See I. A. Richards 1976: *Complementarities: Uncollected Essays*, p. 17.

⁴³⁸ This discovery of 'certain mobile fragments' is, of course, the motor of structuralism's recombinative activity. See Roland Barthes 1973b: The Structuralist Activity. In Gregory T. Polletta (ed) 1973, p. 125.

⁴³⁹ 'El arte narrativo y la magia', p. 231. For one of the most illustrative analyses of [narrative contingency](#), see Umberto Eco, 1964: *Apocalittici e integrati: comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultural di massa*.

⁴⁴⁰ Borges was fascinated by the mechanics of detective fiction, rather than by its moral presuppositions, contributing two essays to *Crítica* on

Chesterton's use of [narrative contingency](#) in plot development, 'Los laberintos policiales y Chesterton' and 'Modos de G. K. Chesterton'. See Amelia A. Simpson *Detective Fiction from Latin America*, 1990, p. 34.

⁴⁴¹ 'El arte narrativo y la magia', p. 321. The verse is quoted in English by Borges.

⁴⁴² But where is the author? In Jean Starobinski's reinvigoration of Poulet's phenomenological approach to subject position the author is held in ritual suspension by the alibi of the pseudonym (p. 237). For Borges this would be a substitutive act transposed to the text-as-puzzle: the author disappears not *within* but outside the text, he has created himself as his own alibi for presence. See Jean Starobinski 1973: Truth in Masquerade, pp. 233-246.

⁴⁴³ One also (coincidentally?) recalls the 'pli' or fold, in Mallarmé.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. 'El Fausto criollo' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 14. 'La razón racionante...puede ligar imágenes y dar asombro a una palabra mediante un adjetivo irregular y frecuentar otras destrezas que hace dóciles la costumbre...' (The rational mind...is able to link images and make a word seem startling by means of an irregular adjective and thereby activate other skills than those that custom makes docile...) (Slightly altered.)

⁴⁴⁵ 'El arte narrativo y la magia', p. 232.

⁴⁴⁶ As Richard Peña notes. See Richard Peña 1990: Borges and the New Latin American Cinema. p. 230.

⁴⁴⁷ Borges is possibly referring to *Law and Order* (1932, Edward L. Cahn). See note in Borges 1991: *Kabbala und Tango: Essays*. Frankfurt am Maine: Fischer, p. 309.

⁴⁴⁸ Josef Von Sternberg (1894-1969) 1931.

⁴⁴⁹ G. K. Chesterton 1962: 'The Loyal Traitor' in *Four Faultless Felons* pp. 169-220. The title itself is not mentioned by Borges, but with opening and closing sections titled 'The Menace of the Word,' and 'The Speaking of the Word' the case is pretty well made.

⁴⁵⁰ See also 'Abenjacán El Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto', 1974, pp. 600-606; 'Los dos reyes y los dos laberintos', 1974, p. 607. In 'Death and the Compass' Borges uses a number of literary pseudonyms to hint at the cabbalistic significance of his protagonists: Gryphius, one of Red Scharlach's noms de guerre (Scharlach = laughter in the crowd [i.e. public humiliation]? Lönnrot = Red [bloody] tribute?) is almost certainly taken from the German seventeenth century poet Andreas

Gryphius whom Borges read as a teenager in Geneva during the First World War, as the following lines from *Auf die Geburt des Herrn* (The Birth of the Lord) suggest:

Das wesentliche Wort, das in den
Ewigkeiten,
Eh eine Zeit entstand, Gott ist und Gott
geschaut,
Das Wort, durch das Gott hat der Erden
Haus begaut,
Durch das der Himmel stund...

(That essential Word which in eternities
Before time was, is God and saw God,
The Word by which God built the house of
earth,
By which the heavens were fixed...)

The Penguin Book of German Verse,
edited and translated by Leonard Forster,
Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959,
p. 126.

⁴⁵¹ This process can even take place through dreams. See Volker Roloff, Aspectos estético-receptivos en el discurso onírico de los cuentos de Jorge Luis Borges. In Blüher, Karl Alfred and Toro, Alfonso de (eds.) 1995, p. 61-82.

⁴⁵² This collaboration is, of course, intended to be noticed from the outset by the reader's decision to participate in the making of meaning. I at least do not believe that Borges would have approved of such a case of wilful misreading as that of Stanislavsky's staging of Chekhov's comedies *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard* as high tragedies. See W. K. Wimsatt 1976: 'Genesis: A Fallacy Revived.', p. 131. See also Brian Rosebury 1988: *Art and Desire: A Study in the Aesthetics of Fiction*, p. 244.

⁴⁵³ Borges, El arte narrativo y la magia, p. 232.

⁴⁵⁴ See Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, p. 171.

⁴⁵⁵ W. B. Yeats 1900: 'The symbolism of poetry' in David Lodge (ed.) *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, 1972, p. 33.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. T. S. Eliot 1919: 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in David Lodge (ed.) *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, 1972, pp. 71-77; T. S. Eliot 1978: 'From Poe to Valéry' in *To Criticize the Critic: And Other Writings*, p. 39: 'We must be careful to avoid saying that the subject matter becomes 'less important'. It has rather a different kind of importance: it is important as *means*: the *end* is the poem.' See Djelal Kadir's *Questing Fictions: Latin America's Family Romance*, 1986, p. 88.

⁴⁵⁷ Borges: 'La poesía gauchesca' in *Discusión*, pp. 179-197 *passim*. 'Jorge Luis Borges ha señalado cuidadosamente la relación entre Lussich y Hernández, y considera *Los tres gauchos orientales* [Lussich, 1872] 'un borrador incontinente, lánguido, ocasional, pero utilizado y profético del *Martín Fierro*.' Valbuena Briones, Angel 1969: *Historia de la Literatura Española*, Tomo 5, *Literatura Hispanoamericana*, Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, p. 178. For the benefit of the studious reader we add the following conceptual reduction of Argentine literature's tortuous relationship with a Spanish literature it could only see as either derivative or predatory: Bartolomé Hidalgo (1788-1822) Uruguayan poet and author of political satire in the form of the *cielito*, a comic exchange favoured as a staple of gaucho literature; D. Antonio Lussich (1848-1928) Uruguayan soldier, poet and critic, author of *Los tres gauchos orientales* [1872] a poem that purports to be the authentic voice of the gaucho and which profoundly influenced *Martín Fierro*; José Hernández (1834-86) Argentine poet and soldier, author of the national epic *Martín Fierro* [1872]; Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938) Modernist Argentine poet who celebrated the pampa in a form of Virgilian verse; Antonio Ascasubi (1807-75); See Luis Mario Schneider 1964: La place de Borges dans une histoire du langage argentin. In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 137-143.

⁴⁵⁸ This is a departure from Beatriz Sarlo who privileges Borges' cultural and literary hybridness, but this is only one way of reading him. Like any great author Borges provides ample opportunity for multiple interpretation. See Sarlo, 1993: p. 3.

⁴⁵⁹ Borges: 'La poesía gauchesca', p. 179.

⁴⁶⁰ This is why, when Borges creates Pierre Ménard's recreation of a passage from *Don Quijote*, its "richness" is meant to be taken

ironically. See P. D. Juhl 1980: *Interpretation: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literary Criticism*, pp. 125, 235-6.

⁴⁶¹ See Gordon Brotherston, *The Emergence of the Latin American Novel*, 1977, p. 23.

⁴⁶² Borges: 'La poesía gauchesca', p. 179. The *cuchilla* (also known as a 'faca' or 'facón') is a particularly gruesome folding-knife, which with its sinuous crescent-shaped blade often extends to an overall length of a foot and a half.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, p. 180. 'Alguien observará que...el gaucha no figura sino de modo literal, secundario. Tanto mejor para la veracidad del retrato, cabe responder.' Borges in 'Sobre "The Purple Land"', 1974, pp. 733-736.

⁴⁶⁴ See Christopher Caudwell 1962: 'George Bernard Shaw: A Study of the Bourgeois Superman' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, p. 151.

⁴⁶⁵ Borges: 'La poesía gauchesca', p. 180.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid. passim p. 179. See also Simon O. Lesser: '...a story may mean different things to different readers, but it also means that any given reader may sense that a story has many different meanings, layer upon layer of significance. To use a term adopted from dream psychology, fiction may be overdetermined; the fiction we regard as great invariably is.' Simon O. Lesser 1962: *Fiction and the Unconscious*, p. 113. Also quoted in Wolfgang Iser 1978: *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, p. 48. See also Lesser's comments on Sherwood Anderson's *I Want to Know Why* in Simon O. Lesser 1962: 'The Image of the Father' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 110-113.

⁴⁶⁷ See Christopher Nash 1987: *World Postmodern Fiction: A Guide*, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁶⁸ Borges might well agree here with Northrop Frye's criticism's of 'naive induction' as the handmaiden of 'premature teleology'. Northrop Frye 1973: Polemical Introduction: Anatomy of Criticism. In Gregory T. Polletta (ed) 1973, p. 40.

⁴⁶⁹ Borges: 'La poesía gauchesca', p. 179.

⁴⁷⁰ The Latin Quarter of Buenos Aires.

⁴⁷¹ Borges: 'La poesía gauchesca' p. 182.

⁴⁷² Ibid, p. 182.

⁴⁷³ Loc. cit, p. 182. 'Imitation is the practice of prejudice.' (Usually that of the reader.) Joel Weinsheimer 1984: *Imitation*, p. 24. See also

Blackmur on rationalism and Eliot in Richard Blackmur 1962: 'A Critic's Job of Work' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, p. 322.

⁴⁷⁴ Borges: 'La poesía gauchesca' p. 192.

⁴⁷⁵ The gaucho is a mythic being, like Homer's son of Thetis, not of the ordinary race of mortals, his regret is tragic therefore because it is measured against the classical standards established for such behaviour. See Joseph Wood Krutch 1962: 'The Tragic Fallacy' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 129-146. Beatriz Sarlo comments that Borges felt any comparison between 'Martín Fierro' and Homer to be 'deeply futile' (Beatriz Sarlo 1993: *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge*, p. 39) but this is only on a generic basis of comparison. As a character (that is as a symbolic composite) the gaucho Martín Fierro is afflicted with a similar raft of woes that confronts an Achilles, and his comprehension of an inevitable end underscores his heroic persona.

⁴⁷⁶ Borges, 'El escritor argentino y la tradición' in *Discusión*, p. 269. Borges was to rewrite this meeting according to a more philosophical reading. Conjecturing an ending where Fierro survives, the conversation turns on universal themes of destiny, death and identity. 'El fin' in *Artificios*, 1974, pp. 519-521.

⁴⁷⁷ Lunfardo, an archaic Spanish, is, or was, the local dialect of the Río de la Plata. Although one can still find estancias where cattlemen live in adobe barracks, attend sullen local dance halls, and whet the odd cuchilla for its traditional grisly work, today's gauchos also drive pick-ups and drink Coca-Cola, know Magic Johnson's slam average and can hum the chorus from any Michael Jackson tune.

⁴⁷⁸ And the ephemera of emotion also. Miguel Enguídanos quotes Ramon Xirau (*La poesía hispano-americana y española*. Mexico: Prensa Universitaria. p. 91.) dictum that Borges fought constantly against expressing sentimental opinion. See Miguel Enguídanos 1964: *La caractèrre argentin de Borges*. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 130.

⁴⁷⁹ Borges, 'El escritor argentino y la tradición' in *Discusión*, p. 274.

⁴⁸⁰ T. S. Eliot 1923: 'The Function of Criticism' in David Lodge ed. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticisms*, 1972, p. 77.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Richard Poirier 1971: *The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Languages of Contemporary Life*, p. 30.

⁴⁸² But one should not confuse this transgression of generic resources for the more general question of how one's reading a work at any

particular historical time changes one's perception of that work (and hence by implication, the work itself). On this question both Eliot and Borges would seem to agree, but only the Borges who emerged as the outcome of his own production. See Edward Davenport 1978: *Why Theorize About Literature?* In Paul Hernadi (ed) 1978: *What is Literature?*, p. 43.

⁴⁸³ Eliot. p. 77. Sometimes this collaboration is one with self-destructive consequences, as Jaime Alazraki points out in a discussion of Borges' 'The House of Asterion' and 'A Comment on August 23, 1944' where he suggests that creators, even creators of evil, are monsters who engineer their own demise, 'wanting to be killed, needing to be killed' quoted in Alazraki 1988, p. 31. See also the terminus ludi in 'La casa de Asterión', 1974, p. 570; 'Deutsches requiem', 1974, pp. 576-581; 'Anotación al 23 de agosto de 1944', 1974, pp. 727-728.

⁴⁸⁴ Borges: 'La poesía gauchesca' in *Discusión*, p. 197.

⁴⁸⁵ Borges: 'La supersticiosa ética del lector' in *Discusión*, p. 202. This is not a problem that afflicts Argentine literature today, and it is chiefly Borges whom we have to thank for it, as Marta Morello-Frosch comments in her comparison of Borges with Leopoldo Marechal, Ernesto Sábato, Ricardo Piglia, Andrés Rivera, etc. See Marta Morello-Frosch 1990: *Borges and Contemporary Argentine Writers: Continuity and Change*. In Edna Aizenberg (ed) 1990 pp. 26-43.

⁴⁸⁶ Borges: 'La poesía gauchesca' in *Discusión*, p. 202.

⁴⁸⁷ Borges gives an account of the poetic and theoretical rivalry between the two poets in 'La traducción de un incidente' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 17-21.

⁴⁸⁸ Rafael Cansinos Asséns in Borges 1921, p. 468. Speaking of that laboratory of *-isms* Cansinos Asséns comments: 'Borges opta pour le nouveau, adopta l'ultraïsme et, retournant à son Argentine, y apporta la nouvelle inquiétude esthétique, la définit, la communiqua à d'autres jeunes poètes et fonda des revues, comme *Proa* et *Nosotros*, où une volée de rossignols proclama l'aube artistique.' Évocation de Jorge Luis Borges. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 7.

⁴⁸⁹ For example Antonin Artaud declares Surrealism to be 'a state of the spirit' and Eluard contends that it is 'working to bring the profound human mind to light'. See C. B. Morris 1972: *Surrealism and Spain, 1920-1936*, p. 3. My translations.

⁴⁹⁰ See Richard E. Chandler and Kessel Schwartz 1961: *A New History of Spanish Literature* p. 38; Valbuena Briones, Angel 1969: *Historia de*

la Literatura Española, Tomo 5, *Literatura Hispanoamericana*, Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, p. 203. See also Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, p. 157.

⁴⁹¹ This reaction was not always clear-cut. Borges proposes 'remedar ciertas fealdades (que me gustaban) de Miguel de Unamuno' ('to remedy certain uglinesses in Unamuno that I liked') in Borges: 1969 'Prólogo' to *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 13.

⁴⁹² 'El ultraísmo de Sevilla y Madrid fue un voluntad de renuevo, fue la voluntad de ceñir el tiempo del arte con un ciclo novel, fue un lírica escrita como con grandes letras coloradas en las hojas del calendario y cuyos más preclaros emblemas - el avión, las antenas y la hélice - son decidores de una actualidad cronología. El ultraísmo en Buenos Aires fue el anhelo de recabar un arte absoluto que no depiendiese del prestigio infiel de las voces y que durase en la perennidad del idioma como una certidumbre de hermosura.' Borges 'E. González Lanuza' in *Inquisiciones*, p. 105.

⁴⁹³ Borges 1921, p. 468.

⁴⁹⁴ See Octavio Paz 1973: *The Bow and the Lyre*. Translated by Ruth L. C. Simms, p. 82.

⁴⁹⁵ 'Borges sitúa el fenómeno literario en una dimensión que desborda los límites entre presente y pasado, causa y efecto, las relaciones entre un escritor y los autores que lo han sucedido, subvirtiendo de tal forma, la hegemonia logocéntrica del escritor en su posición tradicional de guardián de la palabra.' Francisco Soto 1992: 'Arte poética': Hacia un acercamiento de la palabra poética en Borges, pp. 131.

⁴⁹⁶ Borges 1921, p. 471.

⁴⁹⁷ Borges, El arte narrativo y la magia, in *Discusión*, p. 229.

⁴⁹⁸ Borges 1921, p. 467.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 468.

⁵⁰⁰ Borges in 'An Autobiographical Essay', 1971, p. 226. For a history of Borges' literary production in Spain see Carlos Meneses 1992: Borges, el imberbe poeta ultraísta, pp. 123-32. For the differentiating characteristics of Borges' poetry from its ultraist contemporaries, see Videla de Rivero's comments in the same article, p. 132. For a brief account of Borges' poetic influences in Spain see Guillermo de Torre, 1964: Pour la préhistoire ultraïste de Borges. In *L'Herne*, 1964, pp. 159-167.

⁵⁰¹ Borges: 'Las kenningar' in *Historia de la eternidad*, p. 368.

⁵⁰² Ibid, p. 368.

⁵⁰³ 'To reduce each Kenning to the word that it represents is not to unveil mysteries, it is to abolish the poem.' Borges in Gérard Genette 1982b: *Figures of Literary Discourse*. This Borges is, however, utterly at variance with the Borges who would much later claim in *The Mirror of Enigmas* that the Cabbala offered its audience an absolutely effable text, for which it was the duty of the astute reader to interpret. See Valentine Cunningham 1984: *Renoving That Bible: The Absolute text of (Post) Modernism*. In Frank Gloversmith (ed) 1984: *The Theory of Reading*, pp. 21-22.

⁵⁰⁴ Calvert Watkins theorises that the root of the *tapu* comes from a parallel between grammatical and semantic usage. A word that *sounds* like (énoncé) a *tapu* root is associated with the ritual pollution that it implies by the phenomenon of back-formation. Calvert Watkins 1975: La désignation indo-européenne du « tabou ». In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 pp. 208-214. One notes a strong parallel between Watkins' findings on the etymology of "tabou" with that of the Norse *kenning*, whose root "ken" implies 'knowledge' (O.Eng. *cennan*) of a ritual kind.

⁵⁰⁵ As a young man Borges was deeply affected by his acquaintance with Norah Lange, an artist and writer of Norwegian extraction, and his co-editor on the single sheet poster magazine that Buenos Aires' fledgling Ultraists used to propagate their avant-guard views in the immediate post-war years, due to being completely ignored by the literary establishment until *Fervor de Buenos Aires* appeared in 1923. Apart from the recompense of having agreeable friends and artistic companions (he acknowledges the debt by dedicating 'Llaneza' to Norah's younger sister Heidi - which Borges Castillianises as *Haydée*) the Langes introduced Borges to the Norse *kenning*, a form he makes explicit reference to in the long-suppressed *Inquisiciones*. See 'Norah Lange' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 83-85. Borges also quotes a few lines of Norah's in 'Examen de metáforas' (p. 79) in the same volume.

⁵⁰⁶ Borges: 'Las *kenningar*' in *Historia de la eternidad*, p. 368.

⁵⁰⁷ For a discussion of only nine forms of the past tense, with modal alternatives, see Lennart Åqvist 1976: 'Formal Semantics for Verb Tenses as Analyzed by Reichenbach' in Teun A. Van Dijk (ed) 1976, pp. 229-236. Because of the modality of these tenses, they stand out clearly as examples of the inseparability of narrator and the narrated events which he or she must re-introduce into the present world.

⁵⁰⁸ Borges: 'Las *kenningar*' in *Historia de la eternidad*, p. 368.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 369.

⁵¹⁰ Atomic sentences are those into which a complex sentence may be analysed. The English complex sentence, "Paul Keating is a megalomaniac wearing a Zegna suit" may be analysed into the two atomic sentences, "Paul Keating is a megalomaniac" and "Paul Keating is wearing a Zegna suit". [Written before the 1996 March 2nd Federal election, in which Paul Keating, the then Labor Prime Minister, was defeated.]

⁵¹¹ Ultraísmo. *Nosotros*, Vol. XV, No. 151, p. 468.

⁵¹² Ibid, p. 468.

⁵¹³ 'Las *kenningar*' p. 373.

⁵¹⁴ This view is clearly a politics of desire which I have glossed as a poetics of acquisition. Is the distinction important? See Eldar Olson's distinction between *being* or *political instrumentality*, and *poetics* in Eldar Olson 1962: ' "Sailing to Byzantium": Prolegomena to a Poetics of the Lyrics' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, p. 216.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, p. 374.

⁵¹⁶ Cicero: 'Unlimited money, the sinews of war;' George Farquhar (1678-1707) 'Money is the sinews of love, as of war.' (*Love and a Bottle*, II. 1).

⁵¹⁷ Borges discusses the latter in *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, p. 165.

⁵¹⁸ Herman Melville 1953: *Moby Dick, or The White Whale*, pp. 184-192. [First published 1851]

⁵¹⁹ 'Las *kenningar*' p. 379. 'Pierna del omóplato' translates as 'leg of the shoulder-blade'. Karsten Harries thinks that such dramatic juxtaposition is a recent invention ('The preference for tension, for [Metaphors](#) of opposition and collision, is, if not exclusively, a modern phenomenon which rests on a particular approach to poetry.') but the kennings demonstrate there is no ground for such a view. Karsten Harries 1979: [Metaphor](#) and Transcendence, pp. 71-88.

⁵²⁰ Borges rejects any reductionist reading of dream images because it tends to systematise and cathect, rather than diffuse them, thus maintaining their mystery: 'Los "textos oníricos" de Borges, que en una mezcla de ensayo y relato exponen y analizan a la vez, son signos de la fascinación del mundo onírico, pero también documentos de una actitud lúdica e irónica ante el sueño: están tan lejos de las mitologías oníricas arcaicas como de la interpretación reduccionista del sueño de

Freud, dominate en el siglo XX.' Volker Rolloff, Aspectos estético-receptivos en el discurso onírico de los cuentos de Jorge Luis Borges. In Blüher, Karl Alfred and Toro, Alfonso de (eds.) 1995, p. 79.

⁵²¹ 'La metáfora' in *Historia de la eternidad*, p. 382.

⁵²² Ibid, p. 382. As 'tropes' in this sense they conform to Paul Ricoeur's reading of *Metaphor* as based on words as single units of signification. Paul Ricoeur 1978: Translated by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies Of The Creation Of Meaning In Language*, pp. 3, 52-3.

⁵²³ 'La metáfora', p. 382. Such a position is close to Georges Poulet's definition of the art work as a 'mental object' which has no presence except in the act of being read. Quoted in Gregory T. Polletta 1973d: *The Literary Performance*, pp. 309.

⁵²⁴ See also 'De alguien a nadie', 1974, pp. 739: 'Schopenhauer ha escrito que la historia es un interminable y perplejo sueño de las generaciones humanas; en el sueño hay formas que se repiten, quizá no hay otra cosa que formas...'; 'Formas de una leyenda', 1974, pp. 740-743.

⁵²⁵ But one should not, as is sadly the case these days, read a sexual theme into the mere mention of sleeping and fathers. *Sometimes a Metaphor* is not sexually grounded. For a particularly loathsome example of the trend from an otherwise respectable literary critic, see Leslie Fiedler: 1962: 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 303-312.

⁵²⁶ As Susan Stewart notes the image of the mirror is used by Borges in *The Aleph* to locate a fracture not only between presence and absence, but also a means of reconciling absence as an indissoluble hint of presence. Absence, in this case that of the Aleph which refuses to reflect its observer, nonetheless guarantees that this observer should be presented as he who is transfixed by absence. Susan Stewart 1984: *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, p. 126.

⁵²⁷ 'La rosa' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 25. My translation. For an elaboration on the theme of the Platonic flower see 'La flor de Coleridge', 1974, pp. 639-641.

⁵²⁸ Borges was to forecast his investigation of the potential of blindness in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, when he describes himself as being

'[C]omo un ciego de manos precursoras' (like a blind man with precursory hands) in 'Forjadura' in *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, p. 131.

⁵²⁹ This is a purely personal judgement to which I append no critical support. But I would ask, who has not at some time reading Homer wished that the Catalogue of Ships were not so long, or that the Greeks and Trojans would fight a little less and think a little more?

⁵³⁰ 'Las *kenningar*' p. 369. My parentheses.

⁵³¹ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, p. 99.

⁵³² 'La supersticiosa ética del lector' in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 202.

⁵³³ Don Quijote's mimesis is, of course, also a parodic, even 'festive' venture, so that his apparent duplication of the events he has read take on a surreal quality. As Gustavo Pérez Firmat points out in his discussion of Valle-Inclán's *Las galas del difunto*, 'Verisimilitude is no longer a desideratum; in fact, the goal here is to alter the original as much as possible without, however, losing touch with it.' Gustavo Pérez Firmat 1986: *Literature and Liminality*. Durham: Duke University Press, p. 36. Milhai Spariosu points to the 'functional' rather than the 'logical' effects of Don Quijote's inability to distinguish between reality and literature, noting that the mournful knight's madness is often exacerbated by his fidelity to a variety of contradictory models. See Milhai Spariosu 1982: *Literature, Mimesis and Play*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, pp. 75-6.

⁵³⁴ But are these laws causal in the sense of teleology, or reciprocity? As Tzvetan Todorov points out the Jamesian doctrine of character as the determination of incident leads one to adopt an implicit teleology: X commits a crime Y, therefore X causes Y. By this law-like relation all criminals in narrative must commit crimes. But by changing the focus to the crime itself it is impossible to say that the crime can exist without the presence of its criminal. Crime and the criminal become effectively co-present, and even reciprocal: the criminal causes the crime, but the crime cannot exist without its criminal: to introduce one is to therefore automatically imply the other. But how is this theory helpful for the analysis of structural characteristics? Todorov proposes a grammatical division between literatures of the subject and literatures of the predicate, using a causally "strong" propositional relation:

'**Psychological** narrative regards each action as a means of access to the personality in question. A- **psychological** narrative, on the contrary, is characterised by intransitive actions: action is important in itself and not as an indication of this or that character trait. The *Arabian Nights*

derive, we might say, from a *predicative* literature: the emphasis will always fall on the predicate and not on the subject of the proposition' ('Narrative-Men' in Tzvetan Todorov 1977: *The Poetics of Prose*, p. 67). On this reading *Don Quijote*, unlike the *Arabian Nights*, would clearly fall into the subjective category, since it is Don Quijote's madness that causes his adventures. *Don Quijote* is therefore *psychological* ly "strong" but a-*psychological* ly "weak" on this reading since, as Borges points out, the book is shapeless and the adventures go nowhere.

⁵³⁵ 'La supersticiosa ética del lector' in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 204.

⁵³⁶ Ibid, p. 204. Brackets added.

⁵³⁷ But cf. 'Historia de los Angeles' in *El tamaño de mi esperanza*, 1926, p. 69. See also John Locke's criticisms of this catachretic endeavour in Chapter 10 of Book 3 in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

⁵³⁸ In an article in *Proa* ('La Mística, Crítica del Ser' [The Mystical as a Critique of Being] *Proa* 1, no. 2 (September 1924) p. 33) Borges' friend and influence Macedonio Fernández produces the following foundation for what I claim to be Borges' ultimate reliance on worldly reality as the substructure for imagery: 'The world, being, reality, everything, is a dreamerless dream [also] a single dream and the dream of a single dreamer, therefore the dream of no one - all the more real in that it is dream. Matter is what is unreal, an inexistent, supposedly activating this dream. Matter, that which could never be, is thus undreamable.' (My translation from quote in Mary Lusk Friedman 1987: *The Emperor's Kites: A Morphology of Borges' Tales*, p. 117) Although Mary Friedman finds the passage ineffable, its corollary, that the non-material could exist and is thus dreamable (i.e. it exists on a fictional plane like all good symbolism), then what I'm calling Borges' strategy of "radical objective identification" functions perfectly well at the level of text. In fact she even finds Borges' reproduction of Macedonio's view in *Inquisiciones* p. 115. (Friedman, pp. 117-8)

⁵³⁹ For Borges the principle of *magic causality* rests on the supposition that there are some objects in the text whose interaction underwrites the notion of causation in the first place. I have chosen to identify the location of this "radical", which supplies the root image of the progressive narrative, as internally constitutive as the best explanation for Borges' comments on symbolism in text and film. As John Sturrock notes (*Paper Tigers: The Ideal Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges*, p. 97)

apparently impossible elements in narrative are presupposed by more plausible ones, in this case the bears and wolves that the arrows of the centaur.

⁵⁴⁰ The conjunction of horse and man in the centaur is simply a matter of historical fact and should not be taken as an instance of anything more than conventional sexism in Greek mythology. If there were female centaurs, no reference to them survives.

⁵⁴¹ As Paul Hernadi points out, it is the report of mental and physical events together that help situate the reader before the text and serve to enhance its immediacy, evoking 'a human being with the temporal dimension of his existence in the listener's or reader's mind.' Paul Hernadi 1972; *Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification*, p. 203.

⁵⁴² *Discusión*, pp. 222-225, 283-285, and 285-286 respectively.

⁵⁴³ Films, in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 222. For a comparison with the moral view of literature, see also Edmund Fuller 1962: 'The New Compassion in the American Novel' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 57-66.

⁵⁴⁴ Films, in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 222.

⁵⁴⁵ It is vital to understand that this is not a critique of the film as surface. For Borges reception is achieved through the transparent medium of the screen: the act of seeing is not voyeurism (because film-going is a voluntary act for both the viewer and the owners of the viewed?) in the way that it is for Christian Metz, who both sees, and assists (J'assiste) as meaning's midwife. See Christian Metz 1975: *Histoire/Discours: Note sur deux voyeurismes*. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 pp. 301-306.

⁵⁴⁶ Films, in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 222.

⁵⁴⁷ Director Alexander Korda, 1927.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 224.

⁵⁴⁹ 'Our unsafeness is unnameable, therefore retains its power to affect us long after the dissolution of the image. The obtuse meaning is a signifier without a signified, hence the difficulty in naming it.' Roland Barthes 1977: 'The Third Meaning' in *Image Music Text*, p. 61.

⁵⁵⁰ For a discussion of Borges' anti-Italian bias in *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*, see Amelia A. Simpson *Detective Fiction from Latin America*, 1990, pp. 34-5.

⁵⁵¹ Films, in *Discusión*, 1974, pp. 224-5.

⁵⁵² 'El asesino desinteresado Bill Harrigan', in *Historia de la infamia*, p. 316. Quotation marks supplied in the original.

⁵⁵³ In *Historia de la infamia*, p. 345.

⁵⁵⁴ Perhaps Borges has been a little too successful in creating what Christine Brooke-Rose (amongst others) refers to as a 'fabulated scholarship'. So far as his "inventions" go, I have found that, with a little patient digging, even the most obscure reference can nearly always be found right where Borges says they are. See Christine Brooke-Rose 1991: *Stories, Theories and Things*, pp. 171, 177.

⁵⁵⁵ 'Sobre el doblaje' in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 284.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 284.

⁵⁵⁷ Or an eclectic postmodernist, both alternatives that would be repugnant to Borges, although ironically his later work has been enthusiastically received into the postmodern canon, along with Nabokov, Beckett, Barthelme, Pynchon, Barth, etc. 'The highly self-conscious fictive "labyrinths" of Jorge Luis Borges, with their pastiches of scholarly and historical documentation, deadpan realism, and bizarre fantasy, are often cited as paradigms of postmodern literary representation.' W. J. T. Mitchell 1990: 'Representation' in Frank Lentricchia and McLaughlin Thomas (eds) 1990: *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, pp. 11-22. But Gerald Martin comments that Borges' eclectic textualism, when read against his intrinsic irony, contributes to a 'culminating Western perspective' that acts to undo modernism from the inside.' Gerald Martin 1989: *Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 165-6. For a persuasive dragooning of Borges into the postmodern canon, see Christopher Nash 1987: *World Postmodern Fiction: A Guide*. Paradoxically, Norris sees Paul de Man's implicit rejection of Borges' status as a postmodern author (based on de Man's characterisation of the trend as a 'parody of modernism') as still within the general orbit of this annoying neologism. See Christopher Norris 1988: *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology*. New York and London: Routledge. Gerald Graff diagnoses Borges, both as author and as literary celebrity, as being caught between two postmodernisms. Borges as oft-writ-about celebrity can be drafted into the canonical black-hole through the usual forces of critical gravity. The other Borges, the one who writes, obliges us to view the prisons he constructs for his characters as parables of postmodernism's discursive dilemma. 'This condition of imprisonment, however, though

seen from the “inside,” is presented from a tragic or tragicomic point of view that forces us to see it as a problem. The stories generate a pathos at the absence of a transcendent order of meanings.’ See Gerald Graff 1979: *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society*, pp. 55-56; Geoffrey Green 1990: *Postmodern Precursor: The Borgesian Image in Innovative American Fiction*. pp. 200-213.

⁵⁵⁸ ‘Sobre el doblaje’ in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 284.

⁵⁵⁹ As Edward Said points out, no matter the elaborations that Pierre Menard may make to Cervantes, the text is never more than it was. See Edward W. Said 1975: *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, p. 194.

⁵⁶⁰ As Borges was to point out in the context of political nationalism, universality requires a peculiar sympathy with abstraction: ‘Sin esperanza y con nostalgia, pienso en la abstracta posibilidad de un partido que tuviera alguna afinidad con los argentinos; un partido que nos prometiera (digamos) un severo mínimo de gobierno.’ ‘Nuestro pobre individualismo’, 1974, p. 658.

⁵⁶¹ See Geoffrey H. Hartman 1980: *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today*, p. 201.

⁵⁶² But nor is parody limited to the conscious efforts of sound editors, it can also occur unconsciously due to the arbitrariness of language: ‘El arte opera necesariamente con símbolos; la mayor esfera es un punto en el infinito; dos absurdos copistas pueden representar a Flaubert y también a Schopenhauer.’ In ‘Vindicación de *Bouvard et Pécuchet*’ in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 259. See also ‘Flaubert y su destino ejemplar’ in *Discusión*, 1974, pp. 263-266. See also ‘La esfera de Pascal’, 1974, pp. 636-638; ‘Pascal’, 1974, pp. 703-705.

⁵⁶³ Borges 1928: ‘La simulación de la imagen’ in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 83. Although Borges does not directly quote Croce, it is most likely that his views are derived from ‘The Totality of Artistic Expression’ [1917] in Benedetto Croce 1922: *Aesthetic, as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*. Cf. ‘Artistic representation embraces the whole, and reflects in itself the cosmos, though in utterly individual form.’ *ibid*, p. 261.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. Croce: ‘The penetrating philosophical doctrine of the identity of intuition and expression is, moreover, at one with ordinary common sense, which mocks at those who say they have thoughts but cannot express them, or claim to have conceived a great pictorial work of art which they cannot put onto canvass. *Rem tene verba sequuntur*: if the *verba* are lacking, the *res* too must be wanting.’ Benedetto Croce 1922:

'Aesthetica in Nuce' in *Aesthetic, as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* p. 226.

⁵⁶⁵ Borges 1928: 'La simulación de la imagen' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 83.

⁵⁶⁶ As the Mexican author Alfonso Reyes (1884-1959) notes 'Jorge Luis Borges, l'un des écrivains les plus originaux et les plus profonds d'Amerique Latine, déteste chez Gongora les métaphores gréco-latines, si rebattues, et les mots qui signifient des objets brillants sans donner de la clarté à la pensée, de même qu'il se méfie du faux laconisme de Gracian qui accumule dans des phrases pourtant courtes, plus de mots qu'il n'est nécessaire.' Alfonso Reyes 1964a: L'Argentin Jorge Luis Borges. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 103.

⁵⁶⁷ See Angus Fletcher's discussion of the 'engulfing' narrative in Angus Fletcher 1964: *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, pp. 319-321. Ricardo Paseyro concludes that one way of avoiding this engouffrement, in Góngora as much as in Borges, lies in translations into other languages: 'Borges gagne à être lu en langues étrangères. ses textes, débarrassées de leur maniérisme laborieux, semblent retrouver leur vraie nature et réintégrer leurs formes originelles.' Ricardo Paseyro 1964: Ce qui gêne ma vue. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 117.

⁵⁶⁸ *Rico rico* is a common feature of colloquial speech in Latin America, where adjectival duplication amplifies the sense. One also notes duplication in Australasian languages as an intensifier, giving the sense of a variety, or collection of, objects when applied to nouns.

⁵⁶⁹ 'The *Soledades (Solitudes)* represent not only a culmination of Góngora's poetic production, but also a celebration of awareness in Baroque extravagance. Góngora sensed all the energy of the Renaissance liberation of the arts and sciences from theology, and his response here (and in contrast to the *Polyphemus*) is a highly complex and innovative encomium to the harmonious and beautiful world of Nature, a Nature which indeed is utopian in every sense of the word.' David William Foster and Virginia Ramos Foster 1973: *Luis de Góngora*. New York: Twayne, p. 134. As a further list of Góngora's critics would only compound this trend, the reader is pointed towards Quevedo's censures, quoted in *ibid*, pp. 20-21, but cf. 'T. S. Eliot wrote of Ben Jonson: 'We cannot call a man's work superficial when it is the creation of a world; a man cannot be accused of dealing superficially with a world which he has himself created; the superficies is his

world.' Luis de Góngora 1965: *The Solitudes of Don Luis de Góngora*. Translated by Edward Meryon Wilson, p. xv.

⁵⁷⁰ Borges 1928: 'La simulación de la imagen' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 85-86.

⁵⁷¹ See Michel Foucault 1974: *The Order of Things* p. xv. Malva E. Filer points to Borgesian writing as a means of effecting heterotopic vision. Malva E. Filer 1990: Salvador Elizondo and Severo Sarduy: Two Borgesian Writers. pp. 214-215.

⁵⁷² Borges 1928: 'La simulación de la imagen' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 83.

⁵⁷³ See Paul Ricoeur 1984: *Time and Narrative*, p. 92.

⁵⁷⁴ See Cleanth Brooks 1962: 'Keats' Sylvan Historian: History Without Footnotes' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 231-244.

⁵⁷⁵ Borges 1928: 'La simulación de la imagen' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 83.

⁵⁷⁶ In Borges, 'An Autobiographical Essay', 1971, p. 204.

⁵⁷⁷ See Sartre's discussion of the 'happening' as a means of provocation, improvisation and demonstration in Jean-Paul Sartre 1973: *Politics and Literature*, p. 73.

⁵⁷⁸ 'Las kenningar' p. 379.

⁵⁷⁹ Borges' example of the 'leg of the shoulder-blade' *kenning* for the clavicle derives its horror from the same attempt to come to terms with an impossible [textual object](#) as Chesterton's world-enveloping cloud, or eye-monster.

⁵⁸⁰ 'Otra vez la metáfora' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 56.

Parentheses added.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid, p. 57.

⁵⁸² Or 'totalized'; see discussion of compulsive iteration in John Pilling 1981: *Autobiography and Imagination: Studies in Self-Scrutiny*, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁸³ Benedetto Croce quoted in René Wellek and Austin Warren 1963: *Theory of Literature* p. 123.

⁵⁸⁴ I refer, of course, to Chesterton's 'monster made of eyes' [Metaphor](#). Cf. *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, p. 165.

⁵⁸⁵ 'Otra vez la metáfora' p. 57. The source of this quotation remains obscure, but cf. 'Tout n'est qu'images dans la parole; le discours le plus uni est un tissu de métaphores plus rugueuses qu'une page de

Goncourt ou de Saint-Pol-Roux.' Remy de Gourmont 1907: *Le problème du style*, p. 36.

⁵⁸⁶ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, p. 165.

⁵⁸⁷ 'Otra vez la metáfora' p. 58. *Pons*, *pontis* bridge + *-fex* f. *facere* to make; *Zone* Gr. = girdle or belt; *Tragos* + *oide* = Gr. goat-dance. Or goat-song, depending on your etymological proclivities. Or even goat-croak, as Aristotle and the leaned Dr D. S. Margoliouth points out in his Introduction to Aristotle's *Poetics* on page 61. See *The Politics of Aristotle*, 1911.

⁵⁸⁸ 'Otra vez la metáfora' p. 59.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 58.

⁵⁹⁰ It's certain that Russell, for example, wouldn't agree with him here.

⁵⁹¹ This encryption of causal potential is obviously not the same as the Jamesian identification of [causality](#) with character, since non-personal items of Don Quijote's mental landscape, such as the windmills that he mistakes for giants, serve to provide on-going collateral justification for his antics. In becoming incorporated into Don Quijote's imaginary life they *generate* novel rationales that had not previously existed.

Because of this progressive and evolutionary feature their analysis as directly reciprocal products of the character's imaginary life will subtly fail: after a sound beating Don Quijote is forced to admit that his failure to conquer the "giants" is due to the charms of some external agent, in this case the wizard Alfanfaron (Chapter 18), he is therefore obliged to defeat his "major" enemy (the wizard) before attempting to tackle his "minor" enemies (the windmills) again. If the windmill-giants were directly causal stimuli to Don Quijote's martial ardour his response would be unvaried, and this is not the case. See Robert W. Felkel 1989: *Voluntarismo y antivoluntarismo en el Quijote*, pp. 613-621; also see Nadine Ly, 1989: *Literalidad Cervantina: Encantadores y Encantamientos en el Quijote*, pp. 641-652.

⁵⁹² 'La conducta novelística de Cervantes' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, p. 139.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 140.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 141.

⁵⁹⁵ See also Gilbert Murry's remark on Hamlet's prototype in Saga literature as a user of the *kenning* as 'riddle'. Gilbert Murry 1962: 'Hamlet and Orestes' in Wilbur Scott 1962: *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, pp. 255-256.

⁵⁹⁶ This is a madness which can never see itself as such, even when the facts are presented to it. As Auerbach points out: 'When the knight is informed by the wounded *bachiller* Alonso Lopez of the harm he has done by his attack on the funeral procession [Book I, Ch. 19], he feels nowise mortified or abashed. He had taken the procession for a satanic apparition, and so it was his duty to attack it. He is satisfied that he has done his duty and feels proud of it.' Erich Auerbach 1968: *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* p. 332. See also Frederick Keener's qualifications in M. Frederick Keener 1983: *The Chain of Becoming: The Philosophical Tale, the Novel, and a Neglected Realism of the Enlightenment: Swift, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Johnson, and Austen* p. 209.

⁵⁹⁷ Borges, 'El arte narrativo y la magia', in *Discusión*, p. 232.

Endnotes to Chapter Five

⁵⁹⁸ This is necessarily a project aligned with structuralism: personal psychology, that of the subject whether reading or writing, may be eliminated on Borges' methodology. The project is aligned, but not entirely dependent, on a structuralist critique of the gulf between signifiant and signifié - for my reconstruction of Borges [Metaphoric](#) relations substitute for semiotic ones. As Paul de Man reads Lévi-Strauss, 'The task of structuralist literary critics then becomes quite clear: in order to eliminate the constitutive subject, they have to show that the discrepancy between sign and meaning prevails in literature in the same way as in everyday language...' Quoted in Wallace Martin 1983: Introduction. In Jonathan Arac; Wlad Godzich; Wallace Martin (eds) 1983: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, p. xxviii.

⁵⁹⁹ Geoffrey H. Hartman 1980: *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today*, p. 30.

⁶⁰⁰ I'm, of course, employing 'series' in its mathematical sense of 'order', and as such it should be distinguished from 'progression' which means a sequentially arranged alteration by rule-governed substitutions. Cf. Bertrand Russell 1919: *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*. London: George Allen and Unwin, p. 29, 'In seeking a definition of order, the first thing to realise is that no set of terms has just *one* order to the exclusion of others. A set of terms has all the orders of which it is capable.'

⁶⁰¹ Gayatri Spivak in Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology*, p. xii.

⁶⁰² For the uses and abuses of such a strategy, see Paul A. Bové 1983: Variations on Authority: Some Deconstructive Transformations of the New Criticism. In Jonathan Arac; Wlad Godzich; Wallace Martin (eds) 1983: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, pp. 3-19.

⁶⁰³ Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, 1982, p. 54. The same thing applies, of course, to Borges. As Maurice Nadeau comments: 'Nous ne pouvons croire sur simple parole. Ce qui passe l'entendement, le mythe le récupère...' Maurice Nadeau 1964: Borges le perturbateur. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 109.

⁶⁰⁴ Norris foresees the dangers that authority and interrogation bring: 'The deconstructors clearly expect that their texts will be read with care and attention... Yet how can this be squared with their own professed scepticism towards meaning, logic, truth and the very possibility of communication?' Norris 1982, pp. 126-7.

⁶⁰⁵ As Gérard Genette notes, 'criticism...is and will remain a fundamental approach, and it can be predicted that the future of literary studies resides essentially in the exchange and the necessary cross-fertilisation between criticism and poetics - based on an awareness and exploitation of their *complementarity*.' Gérard Genette 1990: 'Criticism and Poetics' in Tzvetan Todorov 1990a, p. 10.

⁶⁰⁶ Compare the following eulogy to the deconstructive powers of the Argentine: 'L'admirable jeu de Borges n'est pas plus un jeu de construction qu'un jeu de deconstruction, qu'un jeu de miroirs; car il suffit de les *nommer*, ces derniers, pour qu'ils s'ouvrent, s'effondrent (ou bien nous écrasent - mais l'accident, par rapport au temps, n'a qu'une vertu statistique).' Michel Bernard 1964: Le bon usage. In *L'Herne*, 1964, p. 116.

⁶⁰⁷ But this is not to assume that communication can be effected across totally dissimilar worlds. As Teun A. Van Dijk maintains 'A speaker-system can only 'form' an intention when certain conditions are satisfied. Primarily, it must be in a state such that it has at least partial knowledge about the hearer-system and its actual knowledge.' See Teun A. Van Dijk 1976: 'Pragmatics and Poetics' in *Pragmatics of Language and Literature*, p. 30.

⁶⁰⁸ Even Derrida seems to agree, although in a very limited and partial programme: '...the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and the entire system of utterance.' Jacques Derrida 1983: 'Signature Event Context' in *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated

by Alan Bass p. 326. As Paul Bové points out, Paul de Man has diagnosed the heart of the intentionalist problem, but one may see even his critique, based as it is on a phenomenological reduction, to be founded on an implicit materialism of the subject - 'What, one may ask, is speaking now except a self?' See Wlad Godzich 1983: *The Domestication of Derrida*. In Jonathan Arac; Wlad Godzich; Wallace Martin (eds) 1983: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, pp. 20-40.

⁶⁰⁹ It is important to note that my comments do not imply a general theory of intention, but merely point to a use that is similar enough across examples to be considered consistent. As to the original intention (what started off the work of art in the first place) one is always in some doubt: not even authors are very sure for very long, not withstanding the flawless memory of Poe, but one may always argue from the existence of a the text that there was an intention to write on a certain subject, or in a certain style, or about a certain subject, and that the text can be used evidentially to support the assertion. Even if, as George Watson maintains (following R. G. Collingwood), all artistic production is artistic *reproduction* to some extent, this does not entirely discount the idea that one may view intention in terms of very general formative conditions that can be viewed as a demonstration of a similarity between texts written at different times or in different places. See George Watson 1976: 'The Literary Past.', p. 170.

⁶¹⁰ As Roman Jakobson remarks, commenting on Benveniste's studies of *linguistic* aphasia, 'It is perfectly obvious that the first syntactic structures to go are the most complex, and in the case of one's forgetting the rules of grammar (d'agrammatisme), the first to be lost is the relation between the subject and the predicate.' (My translation.) Roman Jakobson 1975: *Les règles des dégâts grammaticaux*, in Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 pp. 18. Is not Derrida's own denigration of the text an attempt to force this most fundamental of separations (text/world) on our attention ?

⁶¹¹ 'Un estudio preciso y fervoroso de los otros géneros literarios, de dejó creer que la vituperación y la burla valdrían necesariamente algo más. El agresor (me dije) sabe que el agredido será él, y que "cualquier palabra que pronuncie podrá ser invocada en su contra". 'Arte de injuriar', 1974, pp. 419-423.

⁶¹² Et sa traductrice aussi. Gayatri Spivak, who speaks of 'Humankind's common desire...for a stable centre, and for the assurance of mastery -

through knowing or possessing' as though it were a fact unavailable for interrogation (Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, 1977, p. xi.) may be accused of irony, but only if Derrida is read as the sign that would fulfil her utterance, as the author of an *Of Grammatology* (already an impossibility, given the shifting surface of the text) that did not 'aim' to liberate the human sciences from logonomy. But if not, what then?

⁶¹³ Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, 1982, p. 46.

⁶¹⁴ Jacques Derrida *De la grammatologie*, (Paris: Minuit, 1967) p. 38.

⁶¹⁵ See Ferdinand de Saussure *Course in General Linguistics* (translated by Wade Baskin, Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in association with Albert Riedlinger, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959. [Originally published 1915] Ch. IV pp. 114, 117: 'Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others...' and '...it is understood that the concepts (betokened by their signs) are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not.' Also see Susan Sontag's polemical reflections in Susan Sontag 1973: *Against Interpretation*, pp. 152-161. This has always been the dual aim of phenomenology: to rescue self-presence from the constitutional framework that underwrites it, while still privileging (or foregrounding) the constitutional mechanism that allows the trick to be carried off. See Frank Lentricchia 1980: 'Versions of Phenomenology' in *After the New Criticism*, pp. 63-100.

⁶¹⁶ Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, 1982, p. 48.

⁶¹⁷ Saussure's text was recomposed after his death from the lecture notes of his students and the finished drafts of his lectures. As his editors point out in searching for Saussure's 'genetic' writing that: '[A]fter his death, we hoped to find in his manuscripts, obligingly made available to us by Mme. de Saussure, a faithful, or at least adequate, outline of his inspiring lectures. At first we thought that we might simply collate F. de Saussure's personal notes and the notes of his students. We were grossly misled. We found nothing - or almost nothing - that resembled his students' notebooks...[W]e had to fall back on the notes collected during the course of his three series of lectures.' Preface to

the first edition, Saussure, 1959, p. xvii. The confusions of this text are instructive: the editors are searching for a book that is supposed to come into existence from 1) Saussure's and his students' notes, and 2) the notes of his students made in previous years of existent material. Saussure had failed to keep up with the task of writing 'the book' that was to be born from his 'notes', his historic mission would have to be accomplished after the fact. Saussure, in dying, completes the deconstructive act, serving as the material for his own posthumous exergue from the inside.

⁶¹⁸ Saussure, 1959, p. 123.

⁶¹⁹ At the other extreme of pattern recognition stands the idiot savant, who, like Funes the Memorius, ignores sequentiality for the individual 'numberness' of numbers. See Oliver Sacks 1985: *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. London: Picador, p. 191.

⁶²⁰ Saussure, 1959, pp. 123-4. See Hume *Treatise of Human Nature*, 'Of Knowledge and Probability'.

⁶²¹ Saussure, 1959, p. 126.

⁶²² Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology*, 1976, p. 23. In a rare engagement with contemporary existentialism Borges comments on the more general aims of Heidegger's philosophy, claiming that it makes 'each one of us the interested interlocutor of a secret and continuous dialogue with nothing, or divinity.' 'Nota sobre (hacia) Bernard Shaw', 1974, p. 749. My translation.

⁶²³ Jacques Derrida *The Archaeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac*. Translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980) Originally published Paris: Galilée, 1973. Paul de Man also devotes something to the debate: an even shorter essay. But whether his critique on Derrida's 'contingent polemics' of the text can be made to stand in the light of his own rhetorical logomachy is debatable. See Paul de Man 1983: *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. Second Edition. Methuen: London, pp. 104, 134, 140.

⁶²⁴ Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge: Being a Supplement to Mr. Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding*. Facsimile reproduction of the Thomas Nugent translation of 1756, originally published in France 1746. Gainsville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1971, pp. 303-4. My parentheses.

⁶²⁵ See Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels' objections to Jonathan Crewe's position of the unassentability and ungroundability of

belief in Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels 1985a: A Reply to Our Critics. In W. J. T. Mitchell (ed) 1985: *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, p. 95. Crewe's position is that a particular belief must involve the belief-holder's meta-belief in the conditions which allow the belief to exist in the first place. Because these conditions cannot exist (one cannot "believe" that Elvis is alive unless one holds the meta-belief that one lives in a world dominated by either a CIA conspiracy to hide Elvis, or that individuals like Elvis - and therefore also the belief-holder - are also immortal) Crewe argues that belief is impossible, and is in fact "groundless". Knapp and Michaels make the objection that the determination of groundedness or a foundation to belief, implies the subject's standing outside his or her beliefs - a position that as epistemological relativists they hold as impossible. My own position is one of graduated assent, thus allowing "belief" a status as a meaningful noise uttered in relation to varying conditions of assertability.

⁶²⁶ Jacques Derrida *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, p. 37 and *Condillac An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, p. 304.

⁶²⁷ Djelal Kadir celebrates Borges' own attempts to deal with the problem of epistemological succession by theorizing his biographical devices as aleatory staging-houses for new bifurcations. Such a strategy is obviously powerfully reliant on ironic self-reference and parody, two of Borges' master-tropes. See Djelal Kadir's *Questing Fictions: Latin America's Family Romance*, 1986, Ch. 2: Borges Ghost Writer.

⁶²⁸ Derrida *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, pp. 34-5, 36.

⁶²⁹ Ibid p. 47.

⁶³⁰ See Saussure, 1959, pp. 114, 117, 120.

⁶³¹ In Umberto Eco's discussion of Peircean abduction we are faced with a Borges who exists with the same unself-critical position of Condillac's methodically fidgety statue: Don Isidro Parodi, the eponymous hero of Borges' collaboration with Bioy-Casares, solves six crimes while in a prison cell through the pure forces of abductive argument. A lesser detective might have resorted to deduction in similar circumstances, but our hero shuns such empirical falderal. See Umberto Eco 1990: *The Limits of Interpretation* pp. 152-162.

⁶³² Condillac could have found in Locke's theory of epistemology more than he bargained for. When Locke claims: 'Enthusiasm laying by reason, would set up revelation, and substitutes in the room of it the

ungrounded fancies of a man's own brain.' (John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. 'Enthusiasm', Vol 2, Book 4, Ch 19, § 3 [New York: Dover Books, 1959] p. 430) it would seem that the fancies are ungrounded it is not clear that they cannot have existed prior to reason, since they are the products of enthusiasm, which was thought to be innate. These very ungrounded fancies that Condillac would dismiss from future reason may therefore have been the analytic germs that were to enable the analogic process of assigning similitude.

⁶³³ Jacques Derrida *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, 1980, p. 49.

⁶³⁴ For its effects in Borges see Jeremy Tambling's discussion of 'Borges and I' in Jeremy Tambling 1991: *Narrative and Ideology*, pp. 35-36.

⁶³⁵ In a critique of Knapp and Michaels (Against Theory) Hershel Parker offers useful clarification of another element in the constitution of authorial intention: felicitously received editorial error. Just what makes a text *the* text is sometimes the product of editorial incompetence that creates intentionless meanings, or alters meaning from one version of a text to another. Hershel Parker 1985: *Lost Authority: Non-sense, Skewed Meanings, and Intentionless Meanings*, pp. 72-79.

⁶³⁶ Jacques Derrida *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, p. 49.

⁶³⁷ Marie-François-Pierre Maine de Biran (1766-1824) French sensationalist philosopher of the Idéologue school.

⁶³⁸ Jacques Derrida *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, p. 53.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 59. Whether analogy can be "grounded" at all is a moot point. Technically, as the description of constitutive comparison, it is a primal fact of its own description, and cannot be grounded in terms of being thought of as necessary or fundamental to any other such representational activity. If this seems contradictory William C. Dowling offers a way out of the dilemma by proposing that self-evident entailment does not constitute an identical status of terms. To see repetition as the "ground" of analogy might merely mean that repetition as a *fact* does not instantly metamorphose into the fact of analogy, being at some point merely the recognition that a very strong similarity exists, then finding that the similarity is so strong as to render the objects in question indistinguishable, then concluding that the *process* of finding that this indistinguishability exists relates somehow to the more general understanding of indistinguishability as an impetus

to believe in the identity of the way in which things can be compared.
See William C. Dowling 1985: *Intentionless Meaning*, pp. 89-94.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 59.

⁶⁴¹ This blunt assertion includes, of course, the short-sightedness of its author.

⁶⁴² Jacques Derrida *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, pp. 117-135.
The 'Introduction' occurs as the final chapter of Derrida's book, so as not to be out of place.

⁶⁴³ Quoted in *ibid*, p. 117.

⁶⁴⁴ Derrida, who sees a fruitful relation between this elemental proposition and Condillac's *Essay*, neglects, however, to see the relational aspect (is greater than) as of importance. Would Condillac, or Derrida for that matter, have been able to make the same assertions if it read: 'A whole is smaller than one of its parts '?

⁶⁴⁵ Arthur Schwartz notes that this is by no means a fixed relation, citing examples from intransitive verbs in Turkish that show it is possible to have a subjectless predicate (see examples in Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Latin for 'it is snowing') See Arthur Schwartz 1975: *Sujets et prédicats*. In Julia Kristeva; Jean-Claude Milner; Nicolas Ruwet (eds) 1975 pp. 149-165.

⁶⁴⁶ Quoted in Jacques Derrida *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, pp. 120-1.

⁶⁴⁷ Condillac, *Introduction to An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, p. 2. My parentheses.

⁶⁴⁸ Quoted in Derrida, *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, pp. 129-30.
See also Condillac, *Traité des Sensations*, Book I, §§ 1-3, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁴⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure *Course in General Linguistics*, 1959, p. 127.

⁶⁵⁰ Saussure 1959, p. 127.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid p. 161.

⁶⁵² See Saussure 1959, p. 120: 'Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms.'

⁶⁵³ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, Translated by David A. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) pp. 18 and 31 respectively.

⁶⁵⁴ Borges, *La metáfora*, 1974, p. 382.

⁶⁵⁵ Loc. cit.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 384.

⁶⁵⁷

Every analogical fact is a play with a cast of three: (1) the traditional, legitimate heir (e.g. honos); the rival (honor); and (3) a collective character made up of the forms that created the rival (honorem, orator, oratorem, etc.). One might readily suppose that honor is a modification, a "metaplasma," of honos and say that it drew most of its substance from honos. But the only form that had no part in the production of honor is this very honos!

TRADITIONAL FORMS		NEW FORM
Honos	honorem	
	orator, oratorem, etc.	honor
HEIR	COLLECTIVITY	RIVAL

Ferdinand de Saussure *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 163. Modified. One may find a more poetic description of analogical assimilation in 'Unpacking My Library' in Walter Benjamin 1969: *Illuminations*, pp. 59-67. See also Gerhard Joseph 1991: The Labyrinth and the Library en abyme: Eco, Borges, Dickens... In Mary Ann Caws (ed. and Introduction) *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy and Film*, pp. 52-54. See also Peter Szondi 1986: *On Textual Understanding, and Other Essays*, p. 142.

⁶⁵⁸ This is not to suggest that [Metaphor](#) is the main figure used in Homer, but merely that it is most often used in a particular mode, i.e. as epithet. See Gilbert Highet 1957: *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*, pp. 272-3.

⁶⁵⁹ 'Only in extinction is the collector comprehended.' Walter Benjamin 1969: 'Unpacking My Library' *Illuminations*, p. 67.

⁶⁶⁰ As Christopher Norris remarks of Habermas' criticisms of Derrida's 'poetic' approach, Habermas overplays language as a means of transmitting an instrumentalism of rationality, and underplays its micro-techniques of subversion which are (although Habermas' Kantianism cannot acknowledge it) also rational and instrumental, although on a smaller scale. Thus, when Derrida explores the philosophical detritus of the last twenty-five centuries in the western tradition, just as Borges does, hoping to uncover some scrap with which to trouble philosophy's tranquil surface, he can be criticised as having taken an unbalanced

view. See Christopher Norris 1990: *What's Wrong with Postmodernism? Critical theory and the Ends of Philosophy*, pp. 64-66.

⁶⁶¹ Gayatri Spivak, Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, 1977, p. xxii.

⁶⁶² As Ian Watt remarks in his critique of Richard's Practical Criticism: '[It] surely tends to sensitise us towards objects only within a certain range of magnitude: below that threshold it becomes subjective and impressionistic.' Ian Watt 1973: The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors: An Explication*. In Gregory T. Polletta (ed) 1973, p. 70. Actually Richards never denies this, the reading protocols providing a means of getting at only the most obvious of difficulties in textual interpretation. See I. A. Richards 1964: *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement*, pp. 13-18, and remarks on subjectivity, pp. 347-8. [First published 1929]

⁶⁶³ Computer software manufacturers work on the same principle, any product purchased and unwrapped binding the buyer as a 'licensee' of the company, and therefore automatically liable to its own preclusions.

⁶⁶⁴ A characterisation that was also to infect Borges' reception in Germany, if not in France and subsequently in the Anglo-American world. See Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot 1990: Borges in Germany: A Difficult and Contradictory Fascination. In Edna Aizenberg (ed) 1990 pp. 59-79.

⁶⁶⁵ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. De Man adopts a patently Lacanian reading of Rousseau replete with the armoury of repression and displacement effects that Derrida is unable not to take up in *Of Grammatology*. Both texts treat Rousseau as though trussed-up on the psychiatrist's couch for the purpose of their 'examinations', but neither text can imagine how to approach writing without psychologism. Even Stanley Corngold's attempt to rescue de Man from an implicitly subjectivised psychologization of Being is doomed - the reader is entitled, obliged even, to ask the fundamental questions at every turn: Who is speaking, and to what end? Even if the question is elevated to the metacritical position of the wholly referential (one doesn't refer to the problem's components, but talks about it as if it existed without them!) it cannot be solved, but merely pushed off to a little distance once again. See Stanley Corngold 1983: Error in Paul de Man. In Jonathan Arac; Wlad Godzich; Wallace Martin (eds) 1983: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, pp.

90-108, esp. p. 95. Herman Rapaport, following De Man, notes that the resistance to theory implicit in my own critique may be the product of the wish to map grammatical functions onto rhetorical tropes that will not bear the burden. While this may be true, I do not know how it could be effectively *shown* to be true, since *showing* it would involve an inevitable recourse to the grammaticality of the language in which it is phrased. See Herman Rapaport 1990: Borges, De Man, and the Deconstruction of Reading. pp. 139-154.

⁶⁶⁶ Borges, 'Three Versions of Judas,' 'Theme of the Traitor and the Hero', and 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,' *Obras completas*, 1974, pp. 514, 496 and 431 respectively.

⁶⁶⁷ It is typical of much modern criticism, criticism which has only the later Borges to examine, that it mistakes the form for the function of the props in Borges' narrative universe. Thus, Edward Said can confidently assert in a discussion of reception theory that 'The text gives way to a lone voice, which thereafter gives way - in books like those contrapuntal encyclopedias by Joyce (*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*), Huxley (*Point Counter-Point*), Borges (*Fictions*), Orwell (1984), to a super-formalization of the mechanism of writing.' Edward W. Said 1990: 'The Fictions of Criticism' in Richard Macksey (ed.) 1974, p. 57.

⁶⁶⁸ *Borges at Eighty*, 1982, p. 98.

⁶⁶⁹ Critical fascination with the external appearance of writing, its material effects, continues unabated. 'From Omar Khayyám's moving finger to Rousseau's trembling hand, from the broken tables of Modes to the purloined letters of Poe and Alice Walker, from Borges' encyclopedia to Wordsworth's lines left upon a seat in a yew tree, images of writing in writing testify to an enduring fascination with the mechanics and materiality of the written word.' But Borges never mistakes this very materiality for the *phenomenon* of writing. Barbara Johnson 1990: 'Writing' in Frank Lentricchia and McLaughlin Thomas (eds) 1990: *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, p. 39.

⁶⁷⁰ As Henry Sayre comments on Richard Poirier's *The Performing Self*, the referentiality crisis in modern art, the drive to produce unique art works leads a preoccupation with visual effects rather than investigations of the image through the virtuosity of its representation. He sees a parallel in literature, where the recapitulation of the forms of writing, its repertoire of technical effects, becomes an end in itself: '...Poirier discovered the same sorts of tendencies at work in the fiction of such writers as Borges, John Barth, and Iris Murdoch, all of whom

shared, he felt, the “debilitating assumption” that “it is interesting, in and of itself, to make the formal properties of fiction [or poetry] into the subject matter of fiction [or poetry].” 1990: ‘Performance’ in Frank Lentricchia and McLaughlin Thomas (eds) 1990: *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, p. 97. This view, of course, fails to consider that Borges’ aim is to parody such surface formalism, having evolved his own theory of *deep formalism* to serve as the motivational paradigm for narrative. As Poirier’s argument develops he discovers a confusion of fictive realms that should have alerted him to Borges’ true position (See Poirier, 1971, p. 30). Borges’ parody of virtuosity emerges directly from his critique of fine writing in ‘La supersticiosa ética del lector’ in *Discusión*, 1974, pp. 202-205.

⁶⁷¹ *Borges at Eighty*, 1982, p. 99.

⁶⁷² Ferdinand de Saussure *Course in General Linguistics*, pp. 162-3.

⁶⁷³ I’m using a combination of the standard definition of the Fiction (ficción) here, and an adaptation of Borges’ own reflections, as ‘a story-essay which glosses human dreams and illusions... ironical in tone and didactic’ (*The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982] pp. 342-3 modified) and as the exercise of simulating a vast series of previous works, some imaginary, some real (but all carrying one idea or image from a finite repertoire), and offering their résumés and commentaries in an effort at fictive accumulation which attempts an authenticity that undoes itself in the very act of reading. See the Prologues to ‘Historia universal de la infamia,’ (1954 edition) ‘Historia de la eternidad,’ ‘El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan,’ *Obras completas*, 1974, pp. 289, 351, 429. See also Edward W. Said 1975: *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, 20.

⁶⁷⁴ In his article ‘In Defense of the Author’ E. D. Hirsch Jr. makes a strong distinction between two planes of representation: that of meaning, and that of significance. Meaning, for Hirsch, is the denotative plane of a string of words. It is therefore not amenable to contestative readings. Significance, on the other hand, is a peculiar relation that the author has with the text, placing it in the context of his or her own subsequent impressions of it through time. Both points of view, however, have the problem of transparency: meaning cannot be any more the product of denotation than a particular number is the product of a mathematical operation; 42 is not automatically the product of 6 times 7, any more than the impression we have of a

sentence, after we have read it, is its product. To agree with Hirsch implies that all we do when reading is process information. This is never simply the case however, since reading requires an active process of interpretation: words only make sense in relation to other words, both in the string of a sentence, and also in the strings of significance that we bring to bind the text to our view of the world. Significance, as narrowly defined by Hirsch, obeys the same rule of unruly connotative behaviour: the author's view of the significance of the text varies as the result of any number of factors, including domestic trauma, ever-changing perceptions of self-worth, susceptibilities to bi-polar affective disorders. In the exegesis which follows I have not tried to take an authoritative view of the problem, but simply to chart some interesting points of reference from which to view the bare possibility of some principle of operation other than intention in Borges' early narratives. See E. D. Hirsch Jr. 1976a: 'In Defense of the Author', p. 91.

⁶⁷⁵ See Bruce F. Kavin 1989: *Telling it Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* pp. 135, 168.

⁶⁷⁶ Naomi Lindstrom, 1990, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Study of the Short Fiction*, p. 7.

⁶⁷⁷ Borges, 'Prólogo' to *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, 1974, p. 13.

⁶⁷⁸ Borges, *Evaristo Carriego*, 1974, p. 113. In this theory of succession one may discern the hand of Jamesian psychology: 'A succession of feelings, in and of itself, is not a feeling of succession. And since, to our successive feelings, a feeling of their succession is added, that must be treated as an additional fact requiring its own special elucidation...' in William James 1910: *Psychology*, p. 285.

⁶⁷⁹ Borges *The Aleph and Other Stories*, pp. 238-9. Actually the *real* beginning of his narrative production may be traced to a reminiscence in his 1925 collection *Inquisiciones*, 'La traducción de un incidente' (pp. 17-21) where the early days of the Spanish Ultraist movement are described as an intellectual and artistic duel between Ramon Gómez de la Serna and Rafael Cansinos Asséns. The 'translation' has the classic Borgesian structure *in embryo* - two protagonists locked in an eternal struggle, each of whom is necessary for the other's survival, playing out their timeless battle as universal emblems. Voici the penultimate paragraph: 'We will not speak of cultures that fall into disuse. Life's constancy, its harsh continuity, is a certainty of art. However much appearances may fall and change themselves like the

moon, a certain poetical essence will always remain. Poetic reality can contain a whole verse of Vergil in a few lines of common poetry. And it can be contained in the same dialectical way, in the harsh tumult of a gaol's uncertain languages.' (p. 20) My adapted translation. For other experiments in narration see certain chapters in *Evaristo Carriego*, especially 'Las inscripciones de los carros' and 'Historias de jinetes' where the critical essay is framed within a narrative structure. See 'Chapter 7: Las inscripciones de los carros', 1974, pp. 148-151; 'Chapter 8: Historias de jinetes' pp. 152-155, and 'Chapter 11: Historia del tango' pp. 159-168. For a reasonably exhaustive summary of Borges' principal stylistic features, see Jaime Alazraki 1988: *Borges and the Kabbalah*, pp. 93-94.

⁶⁸⁰ Borges *The Aleph and Other Stories*, pp. 238-9.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, p. 282.

⁶⁸² Loc. cit, p. 282.

⁶⁸³ *Crítica*, September 16, 1933.

⁶⁸⁴ Borges *The Aleph and Other Stories*, p. 231. See 'Sir Thomas Browne' in *Inquisiciones*, pp. 33-41. Daniel O'Hara notes in his reading of Harold Bloom's own redemptive project that revisionism is always paid for by a suppression of the anxiety of influence: One must simply hold the past back with one hand, while drawing it forward with the other! See Daniel O'Hara 1983: The Genius of Irony: Nietzsche in Bloom. In Jonathan Arac; Wlad Godzich; Wallace Martin (eds) 1983: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, p. 120.

⁶⁸⁵ As Borges remarks of Paul Groussac, 'No hay muerte de escritor sin el inmediato planteo de un problema ficticio, que reside en indagar - o profetizar - qué parte quedará de su obra. Ese problema es generoso, ya que postula la existencia posible de hechos intelectuales eternos, fuera de la persona o circunstancias que los produjeron; pero también es ruin, porque parece husmear corrupciones.' (There is always the postulation of a fictitious problem at the death of an author. It consists in determining, or prophesying, what part of his work shall be left to remain. This problem is generous, because it already posits the possible existence of eternal intellectual facts beyond the personality or circumstances that produced them. But it ruinous as well, since it tends to go looking for corruptions.) 'Paul Groussac' in *Discusión*, 1974, p. 234. Concerning contemporary reception of the early essay material, the comments of Luis Harss and Barbara Dohman are as conventional as they are common: *'El tamaño de mi*

esperanza’ which Borges has withdrawn from his complete works, is the most embarrassing example of this early vein. It is mannered, sententious, and grandiloquent.’ Luis Harss and Barbara Dohman 1967: *Jorge Luis Borges, or the Consolation by Philosophy*. p. 114.

⁶⁸⁶ See Hans Robert Jauß 1990: ‘The Theory of Reception’ in Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (eds.) 1990: *Literary Theory Today*, pp. 67-8.

⁶⁸⁷ An apology that Derrida would applaud, since it pushes inscription back out of historicity, implying that the text with its abundant Latinisms may be nothing more than the product of an incessant and circular writing. See Derrida’s White Mythology in *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 213.

⁶⁸⁸ Borges, ‘El inmortal’, 1974, p. 533. This is not the first appearance of the figure of the palimpsest as writing’s infinitely extensible surface of inscription, nor will it be the last. Jaime Alazraki notes that Gérard Genette took the title of his *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982) from “Pierre Menard: Author of the *Quixote*” published some five years before “The Immortal”. See Jaime Alazraki 1990: Borges’s Modernism and the New Critical Idiom. In Edna Aizenberg (ed) 1990 pp. 107-108, note 20. Leo Pollmann notes that Borges’ ‘transobjectivity’ a feature of Latin American fiction that Héctor A. Murena has called in *El pecado original de América* [Buenos Aires: Ediciones Sudamericanas, 1965] its *original sin* (p. 29), functions as a means by which Borges can situate the reader as accomplice in the mirror-game of textual subjectivity. Of course, Borges can offer “us” a more original version of the Wandering Jew - it is, after all, a version that we have been induced to *construct* for ourselves by following Borges’ textually performative cues. See ¿Con qué fin narra Borges? Reflexiones acerca de *El Inmortal*. In Blüher, Karl Alfred and Toro, Alfonso de (eds.) 1995, pp. 27-43.

⁶⁸⁹ Martin C. Stabb *Jorge Luis Borges*, 1970, pp. 129-30.

⁶⁹⁰ Fictionality studies have a long and distinguished history, including Sir Philip Sidney’s caveat in *The Defense of Poetry* that ‘Now, for the poet, he nothing affirms and therefore never lieth’ and Frege’s division of semantic from pragmatic use as a marker of fictionality (*Über Sinn und Bedeutung*). Siegfried J. Schmidt theorises the reception of texts on the basis of this division, assigning semantic value to parts of a text, while reserving pragmatic value for the text as a whole, using its reference to the world as a marker for assigning it either *fictionality* (its

relationship to the real world as one possible interpretation of conditions which pertain to it), and *ficticity* (the relationship of the text as a marker of a world represented in that text or other texts). See Siegfried J. Schmidt 1976: 'Towards a Pragmatic Interpretation of Fictionality' in Teun A. Van Dijk (ed) 1976, pp. 161-178. For Stabb's preference to be non-contradictory under these circumstances he would have to admit that Borges' text is an example of ficticity, while Lindstrom would have to opt for fictionality.

⁶⁹¹ Borges knew this all along, commenting that between speech and writing there is an 'indefinite distance' that separates author from author-ised. See Elias L. Rivers 1978: *Prolegomena Grammatologica: Literature as the Disembodiment of Speech*. In Paul Hernadi (ed) 1978: *What is Literature?*, p. 87.

⁶⁹² Naomi Lindstrom, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Study of the Short Fiction*. Twayne: Boston, 1990, p. 71. Borges had already anticipated this possibility implicit in the doctrine of eternal return in his comparison of Almafuerte (Pedro Bonifacio Palacios 1854-1917) and Nietzsche in 'Ubicación de Almafuerte' in *El idioma de los argentinos*, pp. 35-43.

⁶⁹³ Richard Burgin, *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges*, 1973, p. 28. Hang on, the reader will be saying, I've read this before. Or something very much like it. Repetition? Or hermeneutical midwifery? For a precedent see Mick Campion's *Worry: A Maieutic Analysis*. Aldershot: Gower, 1986.

⁶⁹⁴ For Borges memories are stamped from the press of experience, not as a series of duplications of a prototype, but as reduplications of the 'original' duplication. For this reason Borges could be read in a Baudrillardian sense as being poised between two equally tempting [ontological](#) alternatives. As Baudrillard points out nostalgia makes us the prisoner of an existential quandary: 'The bygone object, like the relic whose function it secularises, reorganises the world into a form of constellation, as opposed to the extensive functional organisation, endeavouring to preserve against it the profound and undoubtedly essential unreality of one's innermost being.' Jean Baudrillard 1990a , p. 40.

⁶⁹⁵ Karl Alfred Blüher gives a decidedly postmodern reading of Borges' textual insertions, making the useful distinction between authentic and simulated inter-textual references: while Borges is able to cut his *fictional* cloth to order, when it comes to inserting real references into his texts, they come with the attendant baggage of historical and

literary interpretation - leading to inevitable paradoxes and confusion. See Postmodernidad e intertextualidad en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges. In Blüher, Karl Alfred and Toro, Alfonso de (eds.) 1995, pp. 119-132.

⁶⁹⁶ Heidegger in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 'Translator's Preface' to *Of Grammatology*, p. xvii.

⁶⁹⁷ Borges, 'La escritura del dios' in *El Aleph*, 1974, p. 596.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 596.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 597.

⁷⁰⁰ Roman Ingarden *The Literary Work of Art*, p. 29.

⁷⁰¹ Borges, 'La escritura del dios' in *El Aleph*, 1974, p. 597-8.

⁷⁰² Ibid, 599.

⁷⁰³ Loc. cit, 599.

⁷⁰⁴ As Horst-Jürgen Gerigk notes in 'Quain' Borges uses a mode of objectification that obliges (zwingt) the reader to suspend artistic judgement while he or she grapples with the exigencies of narrative persona that Borges' character-author presents. See Horst-Jürgen Gerigk 1975: *Entwurf einer Theorie des literarischen Gebildes*, pp. 43-45.

⁷⁰⁵ Ménéard seeks to avoid the fate of Herbert Quain, who was doomed to be misunderstood by the public, by finally destroying the work that serves as a secondary reference to *Don Quijote* - his own recapitulation. Cf. Hans Robert Jauss 1990, '...he [i.e. Ménéard] can only escape the fate of his predecessor - the diffusion of his fame in the inexorable process of possible reception - if his own work does not survive by means of another text...' 'The Theory of Reception' in Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (eds.) 1990: *Literary Theory Today*, p. 67. For a reading strategy that uses recapitulation as one mode in its repertoire, see Thomas Docherty 1983: *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction*, pp. 176-177.

⁷⁰⁶ Hladík is a translator and student of the Protestant mystic Jacob Boehme, whose sentence in chapter 6, 45 of his *De Triplici Vita Hominis*: "Das ewige Centrum des Lebens Geburt und der Wesenheit ist überall. Wenn du einem kleinen Cirkel schleusst als ein kleines Körnlein, so ist darinnen die ganze Geburt der Ewigen Natur" (The eternal centre of the Birth of Life, and essentiality, is everywhere. If you trace a circle no larger than a tiny grain of corn, the whole birth of Eternal Nature is therein contained.) has obviously spurred him to

share in this revelation as a means of being allowed to complete *Los enemigos*.

⁷⁰⁷ Borges, 'El milagro secreto' in *Ficciones*, 1974, p. 509.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 511.

⁷⁰⁹ As Bruce Kavin points out, Borges' 'Library of Babel' must contain 'all possible combinations of all possible letters; the library must already contain the finished essay 'The Library of Babel that its hero is in the presence of writing.' Bruce F. Kavin 1989: *Telling it Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* p. 135.

⁷¹⁰ Borges in Richard Burgin *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges*, 1973, p. 56.

Endnotes to Conclusion

⁷¹¹ As for the position of the narratee one may take a leaf out of "Pierre Menard" and become the product of our own re-narration as Genette points out. See Gérard Genette 1980: *Narrative Discourse*, p. 262.

⁷¹² Borges 'Ultraísmo' *Nosotros*, Vol. XV, No. 151, p. 468. My translation. As Alan Singer points out in a short exegesis on 'Pierre Menard: Author of the *Quixote*' these disjunctions can have the side-effect of troping the recapitulatory trope into a spiral of endless recurrence subsumed under the sign of the reader's cultural narcissism. Alan Singer 1983: *A Metaphorics of Fiction: Discontinuity and Discourse in the Modern Novel*, pp. 17-22

⁷¹³ Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels complain that there is, in practice, no difference between having a theory and practising it, since to think in terms of theory is to imply its practice as a guide for interpretation. Can Borges then be considered a "practician" within his project, or a "theorist" when he's outside it? On Knapp and Michaels' reading of the distinction he cannot be considered exclusively either. See Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels 1985b: A Reply to Rorty: What is Pragmatism?, pp. 139-146.
